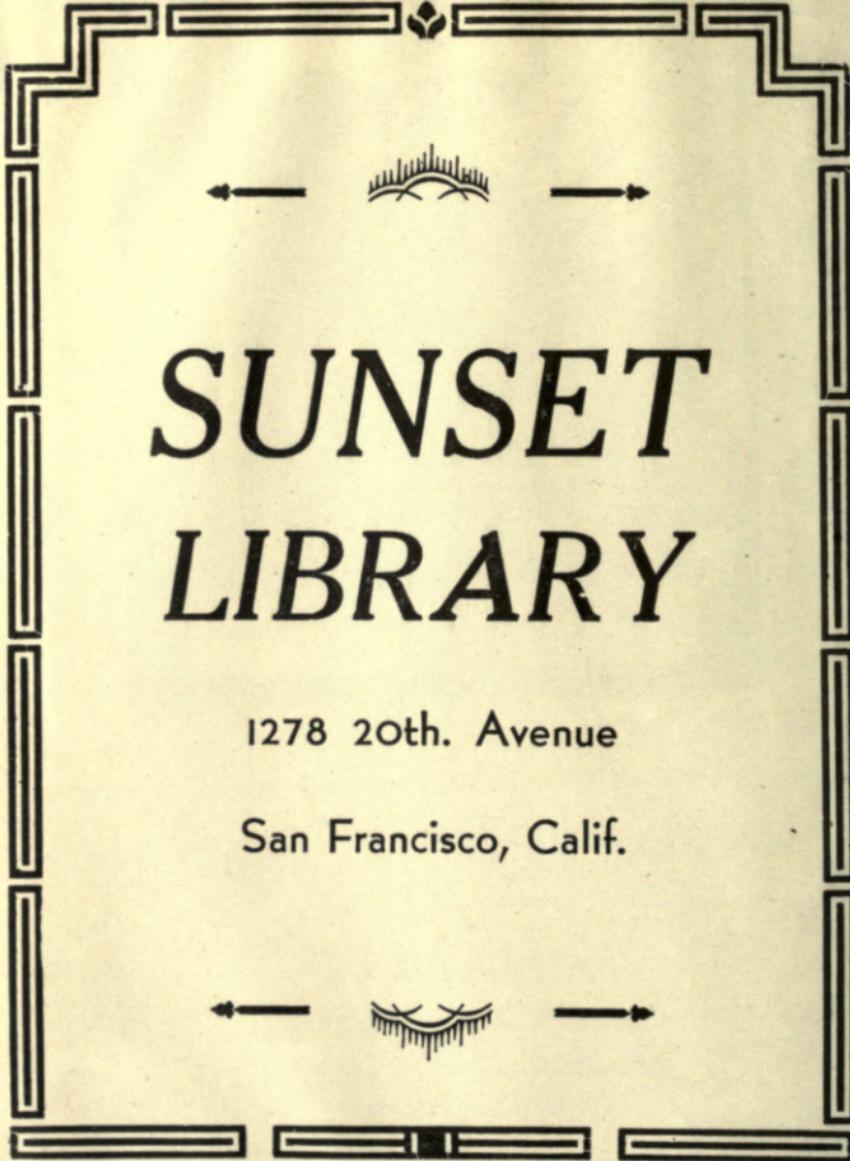


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CRIME AT THE VILLA GLORIA is a baffling mystery story which the reader will want to finish at a sitting. George Norsworthy, who knows the Riviera so well, has chosen Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, with its bougainvillaea-clad villas and its terraced gardens perfumed with orange blossom, as his setting.

Martin Crow, K.C., the famous criminal lawyer, who made his first appearance in *The House-Party Mystery*, is the central figure in this new story. Accompanied by his daughter, Gerry, he sets himself the extremely difficult task of proving, against over-whelming evidence, that Michael Maguire was not responsible for the death of his eccentric aunt from whom he inherits a large fortune.

This is undoubtedly George Norsworthy's best story.

CRIME AT THE VILLA GLORIA

AUTHOR OF

CASINO

DAMES-ERRANT

A HOUSE-PARTY MYSTERY

GEORGE NORSWORTHY

CRIME AT
THE VILLA GLORIA



NEW YORK
GREENBERG : PUBLISHER

To E.A.N.

My dear Buff,

Since you are an insatiable reader of thrillers, and since I know that you often sigh for the terraced gardens, the olive groves and the eucalyptus bordered walks of the Golfe Bleu, I have ventured to inscribe your initials at the top of this page.

I, too, often feel that I should like to go and buy a packet of HIGH LIFE cigarettes from Mme. Imbert; lunch in the garden of the Pension Mireille where you used to do your lessons, and walk to Monte Carlo by the narrow path above the rocks. You, of course, prefer the summer months there while I should always choose the winter for a visit because, for me, that season is almost unendurable in England. Well, we won't quarrel about it. Some time we will each have our wish. We will go back there for both the summer and the winter.

With affection,

G.N.

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CRIME AT THE VILLA GLORIA

CHAPTER I

THE RED-HAIRED MAN

A RED-HAIRED man was sitting at a table in a corner of the Bar-Restaurant Imbert at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. Earlier in the evening he had dined there and for the last hour had been sipping his Pernod and glancing continually at the cheap little clock which stood upon one of the shelves amongst a number of bottles of all shapes and sizes. It was now half past ten.

"Monsieur's friend is late to-night," observed Mme. Imbert from her high stool behind the counter upon which the *Éclaireur de Nice* was spread out before her.

"Oui," was her customer's brief reply. He was an Englishman and his powers of understanding French were better than those of speaking it. Having read all the news in the Paris edition of the *Daily Mail* he was now striving to find entertainment in the advertisements. Presently the door was flung open and a tall, good-looking man of about fifty entered.

"Phew, it's warm!" he exclaimed. He had a pleasant, well modulated voice. "Bon soir, Madame. What are you going to have, Charlie?"

"Another Pernod, thanks, Ernie."

"Deux Pernods, s'il vous plait," the newcomer said with an atrocious French accent, as he sat down. "Sorry I'm so late, but things have been happening and I hung on to hear the result of the first round."

"He's arrived?" asked the red-haired man.

"Yes, and the cat's out of the bag all right. She's given him his orders, stiff and proper, and he can take them or quit. If he quits he'll have to fend for himself. He won't get another ruddy cent out of her."

"What's he going to do about it?"

At that moment Mme. Imbert came across from the counter with the drinks which she put down on the marble-topped table.

"Merci, Madame. Combien?"

"Deux francs."

The man called Ernie gave her a coin and waited until she had returned to her stool before he answered his companion's question.

"I don't know, but I imagine that he'll kick," he said, leaning a little across the table. "Well, Cheerio Charlie, old boy. Here's to it. No, I'm blessed if I can tell you what's going to happen but I'm pretty sure there'll be a hell of a row to-morrow night if he comes along with a blunt refusal, because she's

made up her mind that he's going to do as she wants. Now look here, old son, this is going to be our great chance, and I've made some discoveries which are going to help quite a lot. To begin with I know that she keeps her will in the safe in the library, and I also know that by that will he's going to inherit half the fortune and the niece the other half."

"How did you pick that up?" asked Charlie as he sipped his drink.

"I heard her telling the girl all about it last night. Now the position is this: if he does as she wants, that will is going to hold; but if he jibs she's got another all ready to sign, and that one will cut him clean out of everything and the lot will go to the girl."

"I don't see how that affects us."

"It doesn't, but the point is this; if she suddenly, and conveniently, snuffed out, and no will could be found, you'd come in for everything."

Charlie ran his fingers through his red hair.

"A cool hundred thou', at the very least," he said, looking up.

"All that, to say nothing of the properties."

"Sounds all right, doesn't it, Ernie, but it involves a hell of a risk."

"Not if we work together and you do exactly as I tell you," said the other. Then, dropping his voice still lower, he went on: "I've worked it all out in my mind and it's going to be easy. You come along to-morrow night at about half past nine. Wear your

gloves so that you don't plaster the place with finger-prints, and come up through the garden from the gate down by the railway line, and I'll be waiting for you at the end of the terrace. They should be well into the last round by that time and we'll be able to hear what's going on. She always has the French window open a few inches; and if she does the usual she'll sit up till eleven or twelve, playing Patience."

"Yes, and what then?"

"We'll wait until she's finished with him, then I'll go in and make sure that he's gone up to bed, and when I tip you the wink you can slip in through the window and get to work. I shall wait about in the hall to see that you aren't disturbed, and when you've done the job we'll get hold of the wills from the safe and shove them into the fire."

"She has fires this weather?"

"In the library. She's an icy mortal. Yes, Charlie, we'll get rid of those documents and then you can make your getaway. Nothing'll be discovered until the morning, and when the police turn up and begin questioning everyone it won't be long before they hear about the aunt and nephew quarrelling; and if anyone's suspected it'll be the young fellow. By that time you'll be miles away."

"Where do I make for?"

"If you take my advice you'll get the last train going to Marseilles and from there you'll take a boat, or fly, to Corsica, the next day."

"Corsica!" exclaimed the red-haired man with some surprise. "What's the idea of going there?"

"It's primitive, at least parts of it are, and you can bury yourself conveniently. If you remain over here, where all the papers will be full of the business, you'd be expected to read about it, and you've got to pretend to know nothing for quite a long time. If you show up too soon it'll look fishy and will set people thinking. If you're living the simple life in some wayside pub over in Corsica you can always say that you haven't seen a paper for months. Then there's another thing. With a hundred francs you can bribe those Corsicans to say anything you like, and it would be well to prime someone up to say that you'd been living there for the last two or three weeks."

Both men remained silent for several minutes. Charlie sat with his eyes fixed upon one of the advertisements in his paper.

"A hundred thou'!" he muttered, as if to himself. "By God! It's not to be sneezed at."

"I should think not. Better than your measly £500 a year, what?"

"You don't think it would be possible to put the screw on a bit more and get a good lump sum out of her?"

"No, I don't. She's not the sort that you can scare into doing things. She's the toughest proposition I've ever come across, and I've struck some pretty tough ones in my time. Besides, why shouldn't

we have the lot between us, Charlie. Damn it, man, I've been working up to something of this sort for the last two years, and it hasn't been easy finding things out, bit by bit, I can tell you. No, we'll go for the big thing. Fate hasn't been too lenient with either of us, and it will only be getting a bit of our own back, so to speak."

"Yes, you're right there, Ernie. I'm about fed up with this scrounging round on a few quid a week; but as I said just now, it's going to be a hell of a risk."

"Not with me helping you, old son," said Ernie, persuasively. "I'll see that your tracks are well covered, and this time next winter we'll have villas of our own here, and we shall be somebodies."

He got up and going across to the counter managed to make Mme. Imbert understand that he wanted to see a railway time-table. She got down from her stool and rummaged about beneath the counter. Presently she stood up and produced what he required.

"Merci, Madame. Très bon," he said, and returned to his chair. "Now we'll see how the trains fit in . . . here we are, Ventimiglia to Marseilles . . . yes, there's a train due here just before midnight and it reaches Marseilles at seven in the morning."

"God, what a time!"

"They don't hurry at night, except with the Paris expresses. Now, you'll probably have got

clear long before midnight and would have time to walk over to Monte Carlo and pick it up there. Safer than getting in here; less likely to be noticed. Well, old son, is that agreed?"

There was a moment's hesitation and then the red-haired man roused himself resolutely.

"Right!" he exclaimed. "I'm in with you."

Ernie beamed.

"Good old Charlie," he said. "Let's shake on it."

They gripped each other's hand across the table.

CHAPTER II

THE PENSION MIREILLE

THE Pension Mireille at Roquebrune stands at the top of the zig-zagging steps which lead from the old main road down to the station of Cap-Martin-Roquebrune where the flower-bordered platforms are shaded by tall and graceful eucalyptus trees. The Pension is small and unpretentious and overlooks the Golfe-Bleu, with the rock of Monaco in the distance to the right, and the wooded promontory of Cap Martin to the left. There is no ostentatious display of luxury at the Pension Mireille, but Madame Ribaud is an excellent cook; her daughter, Antoinette, is an efficient waitress; and Monsieur Ribaud is one of the most accomplished gardeners on the Côte d'Azur. Under his care the little garden, with its corners shaded by orange, lemon and mimosa trees, is kept in a state of perpetual perfection except, perhaps, during the summer months when all vegetation welts under the relentless heat.

One day, towards the end of March, Martin Crow and his daughter, Gerry, were having their déjeuner in the little arbour in the garden which was fragrant with the perfume of stocks and heliotrope. Crow was a big, lumbering man of fifty-five. He had a

round, smiling, clean-shaven face and a light, gentle voice which seemed out of keeping with his great size. His dress was neat but old-fashioned in cut, and he had a trick of running his fingers through the short scrub of white hair which stood erect upon his head.

Gerry, otherwise Geraldine, was, oddly enough, a diminutive little person, of about thirty. According to ordinary standards of beauty she was unquestionably plain, and yet she was not without physical attractions. Her singularly small form was in perfect proportion, and she had large, intelligent eyes which looked at you through horn-rimmed glasses. She was neat and business-like in dress, manner and speech.

Martin Crow, K.C., had been one of the leading lawyers at the English Bar. For many years no important trial had been complete without his name among the defending counsel. He had made a substantial income of which he had never spent more than a fraction, with the result that he was now a man of considerable means although he no longer practised. The psychology of crime had always been for him an absorbing interest, and ten years ago he had surprised his friends and colleagues by abandoning his practice and devoting himself to the investigation of crime. His knowledge of the criminal mind, his powers of reasoning, and his attention to the smallest details had brought him many remarkable successes. He was known and respected at

Scotland Yard and the Surété Générale in Paris, and the police organisations of other European countries frequently invited him to assist them.

Mademoiselle Antoinette, a pretty, smiling girl, had served the coffee and Gerry had lighted a cigarette. Martin Crow, who never smoked, drained his glass and leant back in his chair with a contented sigh.

"What a strange thing environment is, Gerry," he remarked. "In England I drink nothing but water with my meals because I never have any desire to taste wine or spirits; but here, in this delightful sunshine, and eating these lighter and more imaginative repasts, it seems the most natural thing in the world to drink the wine of the country."

"I believe you are really enjoying yourself tremendously," his daughter replied.

"I am enjoying it, tremendously, as you say."

"And think of the bother I had to get you to take a holiday."

Martin Crow laughed and, taking a pencil from his waistcoat pocket, began to draw on the back of the menu card.

"My whole life is a holiday, my dear," he said, bending over his drawing. "I find fresh interest in every new face that I see."

"What is it that has been interesting you for the last quarter of an hour?" Gerry asked, as she broke one of the slabs of sugar and dropped it into her coffee.

"That young couple over there," replied Crow, looking past his daughter at two people who were sitting at a table some distance along the terrace. The girl was fair and handsome rather than pretty. Her companion, a dark, good-looking young fellow, was doing most of the talking. He was obviously excited, and his thoughts appeared to be outstripping his tongue.

"I thought so. Well?" asked Gerry, glancing sideways over her shoulder.

"There we have some human problem which will probably be worth watching, if we are given the chance."

"You are incorrigible, Father."

Martin Crow laughed again.

"And why, my dear? Just because the every-day problems of my fellow creatures interest me?"

"I brought you here to forget such things."

"Foolish child! I thought you knew me better than to expect that of me."

"Out with it then," said Gerry. "What is it? An elopement with irate parents or an enraged husband upon their tracks?"

Crow shook his head. His grey eyes were fixed upon the young people who were too absorbed with their own affairs to notice the interest which they had aroused.

"She is not married," Crow declared.

"Because she wears no ring?"

"Imbecile child! What have rings to do with being

married in these days? No, she has not the manner of speaking, or the movements of a married woman. She is deeply in love with him, and he with her; but there is some hitch, and I doubt if they know what that hitch is. They are arguing round in circles and can arrive at no definite conclusion. Well, we shall see, perhaps." Crow took a large gold watch from his pocket and glanced at it. "If we are going to walk over to Monte Carlo I think we should be going or we shall be late for the concert."

They got up and went indoors for their hats. A few minutes later they were going down the steps towards the station beyond which they took the path which runs between the railway line and the shore. They were going to hear Cortot play at the Casino.

That evening at dinner, which was served in the glass-surrounded restaurant, the fair girl was sitting alone. An open book lay upon the table at her side but she did not seem able to give it her attention. From time to time she glanced nervously across at Gerry and then lowered her eyes quickly. As soon as she had finished her meal she closed her book and got up, and as she passed into the little lounge she glanced again at Gerry and the faintest smile parted her lips.

The next morning Martin Crow and his daughter started early, with their lunch, to walk over the mountains to Gorbio. The fair girl was sitting in the garden and Gerry paused and spoke to her as she passed.

"Isn't it a wonderful morning?" she said.

"Glorious." The word was uttered hesitatingly, as if she were not convinced of its accuracy.

"We are going over to Gorbio," Gerry said. "Have you been there?"

"No, I only arrived yesterday and this is my first visit to the Riviera."

Gerry smiled and hurried after her father.

"She's all on edge, poor thing," she told him.

Martin Crow made no reply and, with the exception of an occasional remark about the views, or some wayside flower, they walked, as they usually did, in silence. It was six o'clock before they returned, for they came back by Sainte Agnes and Menton, and from the balcony of his room Crow saw the fair girl and the young man sitting in the garden below. The latter was talking quickly and was emphasising his words with short, jerky movements of his hand. The girl was sitting with her chin cupped in her hands and her eyes fixed upon something in the far distance. Martin Crow watched them for a few moments and then, closing the window, began to change from the rough clothes and shoes in which he had been walking. When he and Gerry went down to dinner the fair girl was alone and appeared to be even more nervous and anxious than she had been the previous evening. In fact it was not until Mlle. Antoinette had put the little baskets of fruit upon the tables that she showed any sign of recognising Gerry. Their eyes met for the fraction of a

second and the smile which she gave was manifestly forced.

"Won't you come and drink your coffee with us?" Martin Crow said, turning towards her.

The girl looked startled and did not reply. Gerry got up and went across to her.

"Do come and talk to us," she said, and almost before the other realised what was happening she found herself being gently led across to the other table.

"I was just going to ask Mlle. Antoinette if she has any good liqueur brandy," Crow told her. "I always think that a *fine* is a fitting conclusion to a good meal. Will you join us?"

"Oh, thank you."

Martin Crow beckoned to Mlle. Antoinette and gave the order. For several moments there was an awkward silence.

"Have you been doing anything interesting to-day?" Gerry asked.

Their companion looked at her, hesitated for a moment, and then said,

"No, I have not been outside the garden. I have been waiting for my fiancé who said that he might be coming at any time."

"He is staying in Roquebrune?" asked Crow.

Another hesitation.

"Yes, with his aunt at the Villa Gloria."

"That is near here?"

"Yes, just along the road past the Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds tea-room. You can see it from

the garden. It is the large white villa with the green shutters."

Mlle. Antoinette appeared with three small glasses and a bottle. As soon as she had left them Crow said,

"I have not been here for nearly five years, and I don't suppose I should be here now if my daughter had not dragged me away. She thought that I was going into a decline for want of a rest and a change," he chuckled. "This is your first visit to the Riviera, I understand?"

"Yes."

Martin Crow raised his glass and smiled.

"I wish you as enjoyable a holiday as I am having," he said.

The girl also raised her glass but lowered it without putting it to her lips.

"I fear this is not exactly a holiday for me," she sighed. After a moment's pause she went on, "My fiancé and I find ourselves confronted by an unexpected dilemma."

"Ah, I was afraid that you were both troubled about something," said her host in that gentle, persuasive tone which had brought him so many confidences. "I suppose we should introduce ourselves. My name is Martin Crow, and this is my daughter, Gerry. Until a few years ago I spent my life in the Courts, mostly defending criminals and other people who found themselves in difficulties. Now I lead a delightfully idle life and——"

"What nonsense, Father!" interrupted Gerry. "You know that you still work as hard as any man at the Bar."

Crow smiled and patted his daughter's hand.

"Don't interrupt, Gerry," he said with mock parental sternness. "You must allow me to describe myself in my own way. Don't take any notice of what she says, Miss——?"

"Beamish. Alison Beamish."

. . . Miss Beamish. I was going to tell you that since I gave up practising I have amused myself by becoming interested in other people's affairs. From that you may conclude that I am one of those meddlesome old fellows who should be avoided, but I am not really so bad as my description may sound. It is seldom that I interfere without being asked."

"Father is simply marvellous at disentangling people's troubles," Gerry declared.

Crow frowned playfully at his daughter.

"Take no notice of her, Miss Beamish, but if I can be of any help to you I trust that you will not hesitate to ask me."

"That is terribly kind of you, Mr. Crow, but——" She paused and with a shrug of her slim shoulders gave a deep sigh. "I don't see how you can help," she added with a note of despair in her low, soft voice.

Crow emptied his glass and leant across the table.

"Please do not think that I am an inquisitive old man," he said, lowering his voice, "but if you feel

inclined to tell us something of your difficulties you may find that the mere telling will afford you some comfort. Gerry, I am sure that Miss Beamish would smoke a cigarette if you offered her one." Crow looked round the room. Several tables were occupied. "And then perhaps you would care to come upstairs and talk," he added.

Alison accepted the cigarette and after a few minutes they went up to Gerry's room which overlooked the Bon Voyage quarter of Roquebrune and the lower slopes of Mont Agel. It was a warm evening and they sat before the open window.

CHAPTER III

THE DILEMMA

“**N**OW, Miss Beamish, just tell us as much of your difficulties as you wish, and I can assure you that you will have our attention.”

“The trouble concerns my fiancé, Michael Maguire, and his aunt,” Alison began in a more cheerful tone than she had employed hitherto. The opportunity to talk obviously came as a relief to her.

“He is a year older than I am, twenty-five. He is a medical student and hopes to qualify next February. His parents both died when he was a child and since that time he has been brought up and educated by his aunt, Miss Jennifer Maguire. She is a wealthy woman and in some ways spends her money generously, but in other ways she is——” Alison hesitated as if she could not find the right word.

“Parsimonious?” prompted Crow.

“Yes, I suppose that is the word. She sent Michael to a first class preparatory school, to Charterhouse and Cambridge, and for the last five years has been paying all his hospital expenses and allowing him £3 a week.”

“As pocket money?” questioned Crow.

“You could hardly call it pocket money,” replied Alison. “Out of that he had to keep and clothe

himself, and pay for such things as amusements, cigarettes and bus fares. He——”

“One moment, Miss Beamish. I should like to be quite sure of the facts. Just now you spoke of Miss Maguire as a wealthy woman. What, exactly, do you mean by wealthy?”

“I really could not tell you what her income is, but she has the villa, here, and a large country house near Church Mortimer where she keeps five or six servants and three or four gardeners; and she runs a Rolls Royce which she brings to the Riviera every winter.”

“Thank you; that gives me some idea of her means. Please go on.”

“Miss Maguire, I must tell you, is a woman of about sixty. She is tall, sharp-featured, severe in manner and dress, and is domineering. I first met her two years ago when Michael and I became engaged. She asked Michael to take me to Merryfields for the week-end, and received me as her future niece-in-law.”

“Merryfields, I suppose, is the house near Church Mortimer?” asked Crow.

“Yes. I have been there several times during the last two years and, in a distant way, we got on quite well together. I believe that she respected me because I was not afraid to express my opinions in an argument and did not hesitate to disagree with her if our views differed. Michael, on the other hand, was rather inclined to be diffident. He allowed her

to have her own way, rather than argue, and I think that he lost her respect by doing that. There is something of the bully in her and, like most bullies, she despises and takes advantage of anything which might be taken for weakness. However, I'm afraid I am worrying you with a lot of silly details, Mr. Crow."

"Not at all, my dear Miss Beamish, not at all. Details are so often of the greatest importance. Please continue as you have begun."

"The last time that I went to Merryfields was about fifteen months ago, just before Miss Maguire came out here the winter before last, and the question of our marrying was freely discussed. Miss Maguire suggested that we should wait until Michael was qualified, and she said that she would spend £2,000 on buying him a practice and would give him £500 with which to start a home."

"That was generous enough," remarked Crow.

"Very generous," Alison agreed, "in fact we were both very surprised in view of her allowance of £3 a week which had always kept Michael terribly short."

"Used he to comment upon the meagreness of the allowance?"

"No, he never did that. He managed to rub along without getting into debt, and his future seemed to be assured, so he did not grumble. He had not much time for spending money. He was working all day at the hospital, while I had my own

secretarial job which provided me with all that I needed."

"Then you have not seen Miss Maguire for more than a year?"

"No. The Christmas before last she wrote her usual seasonal letter to Michael, enclosing a cheque for £1, and sending me some kind message. He did not hear from her again until his birthday in March when she said that she had been joined by her niece, Coral Trent, whose mother had recently died in Australia. This girl and Miss Maguire are, as far as Michael knows, his only relatives."

"Was the girl's father dead?"

"Yes, he died three or four years ago, I believe. Now, the next time that Michael heard from his aunt was last summer when she wrote to him from the Hyde Park Hotel in London, saying that she and Coral were staying there for a couple of nights on their way to Church Mortimer, and asking him if he would dine with them. Perhaps I should be more accurate if I said that she commanded, not asked. I remember seeing her letter. She said: 'We shall expect to see you here to dinner to-morrow at 7.30.'"

"Is Miss Maguire in the habit of commanding, rather than inviting?" asked Crow.

"Invariably, where Michael is concerned," Alison replied. "She always *expected* him to do things. She *expected* him to go to Merryfields for the week-end, never asked him if it would be convenient, or if he would care to go."

"Something of a dictator," Gerry remarked.

"That is only too true, Miss Crow," replied the girl, "as you will see when I have told you everything. Well, Michael went to dinner at the hotel and made the acquaintance of his cousin, whom he described to me as 'a queer creature.' He judged her to be about thirty. She was, apparently, quite unattractive and hardly said a word the whole time that he was with them. The next day Miss Maguire and Coral went to Merryfields and, contrary to his expectations, Michael received no command to go there during the remainder of the summer. Last Christmas he received the usual letter and cheque, but this time there was no reference to myself. She asked him, however, when he proposed to take his next holiday and he told her that he hoped to get away for a fortnight in March. Miss Maguire replied at once and said that she would expect him to spend the holiday here, at Roquebrune, and that she would write again nearer the time. About ten days ago he received a letter in which she enclosed a cheque for his second-class return fare and said that Coral was such a sweet girl and that she was most anxious for them to meet again so that they could really get to know each other."

"Was there any message to yourself in that letter, Miss Beamish?"

"None at all."

"Did you imagine that you had offended her in some way?"

"No, I knew that I could not have done that. Michael and I discussed the matter for hours and eventually came to the conclusion that Miss Maguire was going to try to persuade him to marry Coral."

"She had not hinted at such a thing before?"

"Never, but we could account for the wording of her letter and avoidance of any mention of myself in no other way."

"Yes, I can see that," said Crow. "And how did your fiancé reply to that letter?"

"He thanked her for the cheque and said that he would be arriving some time during the afternoon of the twenty-fifth; that was yesterday."

"He did not consider the possibility of refusing to come down here?"

Alison smiled faintly.

"He would have liked to refuse but didn't feel that he was in a position to do so. It was a most awkward predicament in which he found himself. We discussed it from every point of view and came to the conclusion that if there was going to be trouble it would be best to face it and get it over. Michael knew enough of his aunt to be pretty certain that if she did want him to marry Coral Trent he would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to defy her without making her furiously angry."

"Miss Maguire, I take it, is used to being obeyed?" Crow asked.

"Absolutely, and she is given to fits of violent temper if anyone opposes her. When we were

discussing it I became terribly worried because I knew that over a matter which affected him so deeply Michael would not allow himself to be brow-beaten, and it was my suggestion that I should come down here and stay near by so that I could go and talk to Miss Maguire, if we thought it advisable, when we knew for certain what was really in her mind."

"Does she know that you are here?"

"Not yet. We arrived by the midday train yesterday and after lunch Michael went up to the villa. Miss Maguire received him in her usual, formal way, and after tea sent him and Coral out for a two hours' drive in the Rolls. Michael says that it was the most unpleasant two hours he ever spent. He tried to make himself agreeable but could not get more than a 'yes' and a 'no' out of his cousin.

"After dinner they played three-handed Bridge until half past nine and then his aunt told Coral to go to bed as she wanted to talk business. Without any preliminaries she said that she had decided that he was to marry Coral, in fact she had made arrangements for the marriage to take place at the British Consulate at Nice. Michael listened to her in silence and then, when she had calmly asked him if he wished to make any comment, he reminded her that he was going to marry me."

"She seems to be something more than a dictator," remarked Gerry. "Tyrant, I should say, would be nearer the mark."

"Yes, Miss Crow, I think you are right," said Alison. "Miss Maguire was in her severest mood. She seems to have treated Michael's reminder as a joke. She laughed derisively at him and told him not to be foolish. He pointed out that he was actually engaged to me and was about to say that he would not think of marrying Coral even if he were not, but Miss Maguire forbade him to say another word. She told him to go to bed and consider the matter carefully. He was not to mention the matter again until to-night, and she reminded him that he was entirely dependent upon her. He asked what she meant by that, and she replied that if he were foolish enough to refuse to marry Carol he would find all supplies cut off immediately, and that she would make a fresh will disinheriting him."

"And he was telling you all this this evening?" asked Crow.

"Yes."

"What has taken place between aunt and nephew to-day?"

"She greeted him in her usual stiff manner this morning; they all went over to Monte Carlo to do some shopping, and this afternoon Miss Maguire sent Michael and Coral over to Cannes to have tea at the Casino."

"The question of marriage has not been touched upon?"

"No. They are probably discussing it at this moment."

"He will not give way, of course?"

"Nothing would induce him to do that, although I can't imagine what will happen if she holds to her threat about cutting off all supplies. He hasn't a penny of his own, and it will be impossible for him to continue at the hospital."

Martin Crow shook his head gravely.

"It is certainly a most unfortunate position," he said after a moment's silence, "and I am very sorry for you, my dear young lady."

"Can you think of anything that we can do?" asked Alison, anxiously.

"When do you expect to hear what has been happening this evening?"

"Michael said he would come down in the morning and tell me."

"Then I am afraid we must try to be very patient until then," Crow replied, encouragingly. "If, when you have heard his news, you feel disposed to confide in me again I shall be most happy to offer you my advice for what it may be worth."

"That is very very good of you, Mr. Crow. How can I thank you?"

"By trying to smile in spite of your trouble. Remember that things are not always so bad as they appear to be at first; and remember also that there is a remedy for most situations. A happy conclusion to a difficulty is often the result of keeping calm and clear-headed."

"You really think that there may be some way of

making Miss Maguire see the unreasonableness of her attitude?" asked Alison, hopefully.

"I must not raise your hopes unduly, my dear young lady," Crow answered. "So much will depend upon what takes place this evening, but I do feel that there may be some channel by which we may be able successfully to approach Miss Maguire."

Alison stood up and smiled almost naturally.

"You have made me feel far less wretched, Mr. Crow," she said, offering him her hand. "You don't know how grateful I am to you for making me come and talk to you," she added, turning to Gerry.

"I had a feeling that you wanted to talk to someone," said the latter.

"Yes, I did. Then I will say good night and I will let you know Michael's news directly I have heard it myself. Are you going out in the morning?"

As a matter of fact they had arranged to walk across the frontier to the village of Grimaldi, but Martin Crow said,

"No, we shall not be going out until the afternoon." As soon as Alison had left them he turned to his daughter. "You don't mind, do you?"

"What? About not going to Grimaldi? Of course not. It will make all the difference to her if she knows that she can come to you at any time."

"I'm sorry for her, and for the young man," said Crow, "but looking at it—er—professionally, the case has some interesting aspects."

"At any rate it isn't a sordid crime," remarked Gerry, "but it strikes me that it will be a tough proposition trying to get round that selfish, pig-headed woman."

"Yes, perhaps it will," Crow agreed, "but as Miss Beamish says, the aunt is, apparently, a bully, and I've never come across a bully who did not have his, or her, weak spot; therefore, my dear Gerry, find Miss Jennifer Maguire's weak spot and apply pressure, and apply it ruthlessly. Now, what about a stroll up to the village?"

"Five hundred steps at this hour?"

"If you are tired, my dear, I can go alone."

"You certainly won't. I'm not tired, but I thought you might be after our long walk."

"I want to see the lights of Monte Carlo from the *Place*, and the exercise will make me sleep like a top," replied Martin Crow as he went into his own room to fetch his old broad-brimmed felt hat.

CHAPTER IV

MURDER IS COMMITTED

MARTIN CROW and Gerry were having their petit déjeuner on the balcony of the former's room. It was one of those dazzlingly brilliant mornings when the Tête du Chien, the rock of Monaco and the white buildings of Monte Carlo looked as if they formed part of some gigantic stage setting. Their outlines were clear cut, and the third dimension scarcely seemed to exist. There was hardly a ripple on the sea, which was of that intense sapphire colour which is always associated with the Mediterranean. The light-houses at the entrance to Monaco harbour, the arched wall supporting the Tir au Pigeons ground, and the houses along the lower road, cast mirror-like reflections which seemed almost unreal. Below the Pension Mireille a fisherman was standing in his boat, in-shore, with a long pronged pole in his hand. He was looking intently down into the clear deep water in the hope of seeing a small octopus on one of the submerged rocks. From the Pension garden there came the perfume of a score of flowers; roses, heliotrope, stocks, carnations, orange blossom, wistaria, and many others.

Martin Crow and his daughter had been eating in silence for some minutes and it was not until they saw Alison Beamish walk across the small stretch of grass, and settle herself in the little arbour, that the former spoke.

"I wonder how long it will be before she hears anything," he said.

"It must be terrible not knowing what has happened," Gerry replied. "I'm terribly sorry for them both, but I'm inclined to think that he is probably entirely to blame for the present situation."

"How?"

"He has obviously played the part of the obedient, uncomplaining little boy to that aunt, and she, no doubt, despises him heartily for not making a stand against her."

"You may be right, my dear, but don't forget that we know next to nothing about him."

"Quite, but I feel that I know a good deal about Miss Maguire," answered Gerry. "You heard what Miss Beamish said, that the aunt seemed to respect her because she wasn't afraid of giving her opinion. I imagine that he accepted, or pretended to accept everything that Miss Maguire said."

Martin Crow emptied his coffee cup and stood up.

"Well, that may have been prudent on his part," he said. "We must remember that he is entirely dependent upon her, for his present needs and for

his future, and, as far as we know, he has had no cause to disagree seriously with her until he came here the day before yesterday."

"No, probably not, but continual acquiescence in trivial matters no doubt led Miss Maguire to suppose that she could do whatever she liked with him; and this sudden opposition will probably be attributed to Alison's influence. Have you any idea how she might be approached?"

Crow was watching one of the great Italian liners which had just come out of Villefranche harbour, on its way from New York, and was now heading for Genoa. He did not reply for half a minute.

"No, I can't say that I have," he said at length. "So much will depend upon what took place at the villa last night. Presumably Miss Maguire is quite determined that he shall marry the other girl, and he appears to be equally determined not to. From what we have heard of Miss Maguire I should expect her to dismiss him from her villa and tell him not to show his face there again unless he changes his mind."

"Which he won't do."

"According to Miss Beamish."

"And he will find himself penniless and with very little chance of earning a living."

Martin Crow made no reply. He turned into the room and fetched his binoculars from the chest of drawers.

"At the back of my mind I have a suspicion

that you are thinking of helping him, practically, in some way," Gerry remarked.

Martin Crow, who had been following the liner with the glasses, lowered them and looked round.

"There isn't much that escapes you, is there, my dear?" he said with a smile.

"It seemed to me to be an obvious solution if we could think of a tactful way of doing it."

"Yes, one does not want to hurt anyone's feelings, but I think that we ought to be able to avoid doing that. Young Maguire is in his fifth year, and his medical knowledge might be of the greatest help to us at times."

Gerry laughed.

"I see, employ him as pathologist?"

"Something of that sort, my dear."

"Of course they'd both see through the little plan."

"Possibly, but we could put it in such a way that they would not feel they were accepting charity."

"And he could continue his studies?" said Gerry.

Martin Crow remained silent. He was watching Mlle. Antoinette who was going across the garden to the harbour. He saw her hand Alison a note which was quickly opened; then he heard a sharp cry.

"I'm afraid it's bad news, Gerry," Crow said, swinging round. "Perhaps you might be able to help her if you went down."

Gerry did not wait to ask any questions but ran out of the room and down the stairs. She found

Alison Beamish sitting with a crumpled sheet of paper in her hand. Her cheeks were the colour of chalk and she seemed unable to speak.

"What is the matter?" Gerry asked, laying her hand upon the girl's shoulder.

Alison looked up with staring eyes and, still without speaking, handed her the note. Gerry unfolded it and saw that it was headed:

"Wednesday 5 a.m."

"Darling. I'm afraid this is going to be a bit of a shock for you but you must have courage as I know that it must come all right in the end. We had a furious row last night. Of course I refused and she told me to leave the villa before she was up in the morning and never to let her see me again. I went off to my room to think things over and decided that I would clear out at once. When I went downstairs with my suit-case I found that she had been murdered. The police were called, they questioned everyone, Coral Trent acting as interpreter. A few minutes ago I was informed that I should be charged with the murder and would be taken over to Nice for examination by the magistrate. Will you come and see me at the Prefecture as soon as possible and we will discuss the problem of engaging a French lawyer. Always yours, dearest, M.

"P.S. I need hardly tell you that I didn't do it."

Gerry called up to her father who came down at once and was shown Michael's letter. By this time the Pension Mireille was in a state of the greatest excitement, for the gendarme who had brought the envelope had given Mme. Ribaud a graphic account of the *affaire* at the Villa Gloria.

"But this is terrible, Mademoiselle, terrible," cried Madame Ribaud, rushing into the garden. "There must surely be some mistake. Monsieur was so charming. I am sure he could not do such a thing. Ah, the police! They are imbeciles! The real murderers always go unpunished."

Martin Crow agreed with Madame that some mistake had most certainly been made, and he asked her to be good enough to ring up a garage and order a taxi to take them over to Nice at once. Then he turned his attention to Alison, who was still dazed by the shock of the news. He sat down beside her and took her hand in his.

"This is very terrible for you, my dear," he said, in his gentlest tone, "but you must try to be brave for your Michael's sake. I have had a good deal of experience with the French police and you must remember that their methods are not the same as ours. They are much more precipitate in taking action, and are not so afraid of making blunders as our police are. Moreover, in this country, an arrested man is considered guilty until he has proved his innocence. On the other hand, they are, in many ways, far more lenient. They give more consideration to extenuating circumstances."

"But Michael could not possibly have done such a thing!" Alison cried. "There can be no question of extenu——"

"No, no, of course not," said Crow, patting her hand. "I should not have used that stupid expression,

but I wished to show you that at the moment it all seems so much worse than it really may turn out to be. I have just ordered a taxi to take us over to Nice. Will you allow us to take you?"

"Of course, I shall be so grateful."

"And directly we get there we will see about instructing a French lawyer to prepare his defence."

"But can't you do that, Mr. Crow?" Alison looked disappointed.

"You can rely upon me, my dear young lady, to do all I can," Crow replied, "but a French lawyer will be indispensable. We have the technicalities of the law to consider, and it is most important that Michael's interests should be watched by someone who is conversant with all the details of procedure. Michael has declared his innocence, and you have assured me that he could not have committed such a crime. I shall assume both those statements to be true and shall make it my business to play the part of amateur detective, and search for clues which will establish someone else's guilt."

"You are very very kind, Mr. Crow. What should I have done if you had not been here?"

"Providence, perhaps, foresaw what was going to happen and sent me on this little holiday so that I might be of some assistance to you," Crow said as he stood up.

Half an hour later they were driving along the busy lower road to Nice where they at once went to the British Consulate. The Vice-Consul, in the

absence of his chief, had already been informed of Michael's arrest, by telephone from the Prefecture, but he had not yet seen either the accused or the Commissaire. The latter had been ordered to take charge of the case, from the Roquebrune police, by order of the Préfet.

The Vice-Consul listened with interest to Alison's account of the relationship between Miss Maguire and her nephew and said that a lady giving the name of Coral Trent had called at the Consulate four or five days ago, accompanied by a tall, elderly woman, and had given notice that she wished to marry Michael Maguire as soon as the necessary formalities could be complied with. The Vice-Consul agreed with Martin Crow that a French lawyer should be engaged at once, and after a short discussion they all went out to the waiting car and drove to an office in the vicinity of the Palais de Justice.

Maître Corbin, the lawyer, was a large bearded man who talked in a loud, sonorous voice and used his hands freely as he spoke. He listened silently to the bare facts of the case and then said that it was useless to enter into any discussion until they had seen the accused. He would accompany them at once to the Prefecture which was just round the corner.

It was found that Michael Maguire had been taken back to the Villa Gloria where the Juge d'Instruction was reconstructing the crime, and they were asked to return at two o'clock. Maître Corbin exclaimed,

"Mon Dieu! This is how they always keep one hanging about." The Vice-Consul said, "Well, it can't be helped," and Martin Crow calmly remarked that he was sorry they had been taken away from their work unnecessarily and hoped that they would be able to return at two. Maître Corbin said that it would be impossible for him to do so and then decided that he would come. The Vice-Consul made no fuss at all, and they parted with many handshakes.

It was already past midday, and Martin Crow and the two girls walked along the Promenade des Anglais and lunched on the terrace of the Hotel Ruhl. At two o'clock they returned to the Prefecture where they found the Vice-Consul and the lawyer waiting for them, but it was nearly four o'clock before they were invited to go along to the office of M. Peille, the Commissaire.

CHAPTER V

THE CASE AGAINST MICHAEL MAGUIRE

M. PEILLE was a short, red-faced man who looked more like a genial priest than a police officer. He at once remembered Martin Crow and expressed his delight at renewing the acquaintance of his *collaborateur* of the *affaire Jehnan*. Crow returned the compliment in his perfect French, and after he had introduced Gerry and Alison explained how he came to be interested in the case of Michael Maguire.

"Ah! You have watched its later developments, so to speak," M. Peille said, and then shook his head gravely. "It is indeed very sad for Mademoiselle," he went on, indicating Alison, who only understood an occasional word. "Unfortunately the evidence is clear, but I admit that it indicates, without doubt, that this young man was provoked in a manner which only a person fortified by unusual self-control could have faced with absolute calm. You are conversant with the details?"

Maître Corbin explained how much was known to himself and his companions.

"I must first tell you," said the Commissaire, "that since the accused is an Englishman, and the

nephew of one of the Riviera's most respected winter residents, I am prepared to depart from our normal procedure and lay all the facts before you. I will present the case to you from our point of view. It was at ten thirty last night that the Brigadier at the Gendarmerie of Roquebrune-Cap-Martin received a telephone message from the Villa Gloria saying that Mlle. Maguire had been found murdered in the library. The Brigadier and two gendarmes went at once to the villa and found Mademoiselle leaning back in her chair at her writing table, apparently dead. There was a wound on the right side of her head and a heavy silver candlestick, upon which there were strands of hair and blood, was lying on the floor.

"The Brigadier was met by M. Maguire, now the accused, the maître d'hotel, an Englishman named Boughton, and he afterwards saw a young lady, Mlle. Trent, who understood and spoke a little French and acted as interpreter during the preliminary interrogations. The accused said that he discovered the crime and, in answer to further questions, declared that he had been discussing business matters with his aunt and had had a serious disagreement with her. She had ordered him to leave the villa early in the morning before she appeared, but he had elected to leave that night. He went up to his room, packed his *valise* and was about to go out by the front door when he decided that he would inform Mademoiselle, his aunt, of his intention. He left the *valise* in the

hall and entered the library where he had parted from his relation only half an hour previously. There he discovered her sitting at her writing table, dead. The candlestick was lying on the floor at her side.

"That is the story of Michael Maguire as he related it to the Brigadier. Boughton, the maître d'hotel, said that Mlle. Maguire and her nephew had been alone in the library on the previous evening and that he had heard the young man's voice raised in anger several times. Last night Boughton was feeling a little indisposed and went to bed earlier than usual, in fact he was going along the corridor to his room when Mlle. Trent came up the stairs. At that moment he again heard the accused talking angrily, and even when he was in his room, undressing, he could still hear the voices downstairs. Boughton says that he had just got into bed when he heard M. Maguire come up to his room and close the door with a bang. For a little while, perhaps twenty minutes, there was silence and then he heard a commotion in the room on the other side of the passage, the room of the accused. Boughton imagined that the young man had given way to a violent fit of temper and was throwing his things about. The latter explained this noise by saying that he was opening and closing drawers and cupboards while he was packing his valise. However, the maître d'hotel did not become alarmed until he heard the accused come out of his room and go down the stairs, and then he decided that he would follow him.

He put on a pair of trousers and an overcoat and descended to the hall where he noticed that the front door was open and a *valise* standing beside it. A sound attracted him to the library and on entering the room he saw the accused standing over his aunt who was lying back in her chair with blood streaming from her forehead.

"Boughton declares that the young man looked round with a start and said that his aunt had been murdered by someone who must have entered the room by the window. Boughton went across to both windows to see if one of them had been forced open, but he found them both securely fastened. He then asked Monsieur to look at the windows in the salon and *salle à manger* while he looked round the servants' quarters. Everything was found to be in order, shut and secured. Boughton then telephoned to the *gendarmerie*."

"Did he suspect M. Maguire of having killed his aunt?" Maître Corbin asked.

"He afterwards told me that he was a little suspicious when he saw him standing over the body, and that he became certain when he found that no one could have entered the house by the windows," replied the Commissaire.

"Did he accuse M. Maguire before the police arrived?" questioned Martin Crow.

"No, he was careful to conceal his suspicions because, he told me, he did not want the police to begin by being prejudiced. It was with the

greatest reluctance that he admitted to me that he was afraid M. Maguire had been carried away by a sudden passion of anger. We questioned everyone else in the house, of course. The other servants were not able to help us; they all occupy rooms at the back of the villa in a wing which is shut off by a door. Mlle. Trent could only say that she had heard her aunt and cousin quarrelling from her own room which is over the salon."

"She heard no cry?" asked Maître Corbin.

"She could not be certain about that. She did hear something which might have been a cry or an exclamation of anger."

"And you have arrested the accused on the bare evidence and suspicions of Boughton?" Crow asked in an accusing tone.

"By no means, Monsieur," replied the Commissaire, suavely. "He was not arrested until a quarter to five this morning, several hours after I arrived at the Villa Gloria and had interrogated him with the aid of an official interpreter. During his examination of the villa the Brigadier made several important discoveries which required explanations from M. Maguire, and his answers were far from satisfactory."

"I am not surprised, considering the hour and the circumstances," said Crow.

The Commissaire shrugged his shoulders.

"It is necessary to interrogate without delay, Monsieur," he said, "otherwise confusion is

inevitable. During my questioning he admitted that his aunt had been trying to compel him to marry Mlle. Trent although she knew that he was already affianced to someone else. Then he told me that Mlle. Maguire had shown him two testamentary documents. By the first, which, I understand, had been signed some months previously, he and Mlle. Trent would each receive half of the defunct lady's fortune which, he told me, amounts to many thousands of *livres* sterling. By the second document, which was not yet signed, he was not to receive one *sou* unless he was married to Mlle. Trent. Now, Messieurs, do you not consider it strange when I tell you that neither of those documents can be found, but that a quantity of charred paper lies in the fireplace in the library?"

"You suggest that M. Maguire deliberately burnt them?" demanded Crow.

"But yes, in the absence of any satisfactory explanation of their disappearance to the contrary," replied the Commissaire as he leant back in his chair and polished the lenses of his pince-nez.

"But would you expect him to destroy a document by which he would inherit half of his aunt's considerable fortune?"

"Ah, M. Crow, that is a point which we must investigate further," warned M. Peille. "For the moment I offer two explanations for such conduct. He may have thought that the terms of those wills would provide us with a motive for his crime. Or

he may have hoped that by destroying them both he would inherit the whole of his aunt's fortune."

"The whole of it!" exclaimed Crow. "I do not understand, M. le Commissaire."

"Is it not a fact," asked M. Peille, "that by your English law everything goes to the nearest relation if a person dies without making a will?"

"Yes, yes, but . . ."

"From what M. Maguire has told me it seems that he is his aunt's next-of-kin."

"But the idea is preposterous, my dear sir!" Martin Crow cried, indignantly. "Do you seriously think that a young man of his character and position would commit murder because he wanted to inherit two hundred thousand pounds instead of one hundred thousand, or whatever the amounts might be?"

"More extraordinary things than that have come under my notice, Mr. Crow."

"I cannot believe that any man could be so avaricious, or that any sane man would have been so frank, as the accused appears to have been with you, unless he were innocent. Reflect, M. Peille, practically everything which he has told you has prejudiced your mind against him. He need not have told you a quarter of what he did."

"Yes, that is possible," admitted the Commissaire, "but let me remind you that it was not until I had interrogated him for nearly three hours that I was able to wrench from him the details of his quarrel with his aunt."

"Have you at any time suspected Boughton or any of the other servants?" asked Maître Corbin.

"But what motive could any of them have had for killing the woman who employed them; and the maître d'hotel least of all."

"Why do you lay stress on him?" asked Crow.

"He had no reason for supposing that he would benefit in any way under Mademoiselle's will and her death might very well mean that he will lose a good position. Moreover, when he was questioned he gave his evidence readily and without any confusion or contradictions. Nothing which we have discovered has in any way pointed to him as the guilty one. On the other hand the Brigadier found five *mille* notes stuffed into a corner of the accused's valise. Now, Mlle. Trent has told us that yesterday evening during dinner, she heard her cousin telling her aunt that he had only two hundred francs and a little English money in his possession, and he has admitted that that is correct. Mlle. Trent also informed us that yesterday morning she and her aunt and her cousin went into Monte Carlo and visited the English Bank where Mlle. Maguire drew out six thousand francs. One of the *mille* notes which she was given was changed while they were shopping, the remaining five she locked in her safe when she returned to the villa."

"Mlle. Trent saw her put them there?" asked Crow.

"Yes."

"Did the accused go into the bank and see his aunt withdraw the money?" questioned the lawyer.

"Both he and Mlle. Trent went in."

"And did he know that the five *mille* notes had been locked away in the safe?"

"He told me that he did not know," answered the Commissaire. "But that is of no importance. Mlle. Maguire had left the safe door wide open when she took out the wills, so he would have had no difficulty in finding them."

"And did you make any other incriminating discoveries, M. Peille?"

"Yes. Several streaks of blood on the sleeve of M. Maguire's jacket. I think you will admit, Messieurs, that I found myself possessed with much evidence which pointed to M. Maguire as the murderer, and when I took into consideration the unsatisfactory manner in which he gave us information, I felt fully justified in arresting him. It——"

"One moment, M. Peille," interrupted Crow. "What, exactly do you mean by 'unsatisfactory manner'?"

"I refer, Monsieur, to his initial reluctance to talk. If he had started by telling the Brigadier of everything that had happened; if, with me, he had at once given the reason for his disagreement with his aunt and had then explained about the testamentary documents, I should not have been so ready to suspect him. But I assure you I had to

drag all those facts from him; yes, I dragged them, word by word."

Martin Crow, who seldom allowed himself to be easily influenced until he had personally made at least a preliminary investigation of the facts, could not help feeling that the case against Michael Maguire was, indeed, a formidable one.

"I suppose you have examined the candlestick for finger-prints?" he asked.

"I was about to tell you, a few seconds ago, that I received a report from the experts just before you arrived. The finger-prints on the candlestick were, without doubt, made by the accused."

"You have confronted him with that evidence?"

"But naturally."

"What does he say?"

"He explained it by saying that he handled the candlestick while he was arguing with Mlle. Maguire," replied the Commissaire, gravely. "And now, Messieurs, I will have him brought in," he added, as he touched a bell on his desk.

CHAPTER VI

“LE MEURTRIER”

THE news that murder had been committed at the Villa Gloria had not reached the ears of the newspaper reporters until the *Éclaireur de Nice* and the *Petit Niçois* were already being sold in the kiosks, but by midday Michael Maguire was being spoken of as *le meurtrier* and Miss Maguire as *la victime*. In France reporters and sub-editors do not have to worry about that word “alleged” which is of such importance in English journalism. Directly a man is arrested in France, however slight the evidence against him may be, he is referred to as *le meurtrier*, *l’assassin*, or *le voleur*, according to the nature of the crime which he is supposed to have committed; and as long as a year or eighteen months may elapse before he is finally brought before the judge and jury. During that time the unfortunate individual is repeatedly questioned by the *Juge d’Instruction* whose business it is to collect all available information resulting from the cross-examination of witnesses before the trial commences. Under this method the evidence of each witness often gives the *Juge d’Instruction* a fresh excuse to re-examine the accused.

Since the discovery of the crime at the Villa Gloria Michael Maguire had been questioned for more than an hour by the Brigadier, and upon the arrival of the Commissaire from Nice he had been subjected to a further and searching interrogation, which had lasted for nearly three hours. After his arrival at Nice he was questioned by the *Juge d'Instruction*, and when he was taken back to the villa at about midday, for a reconstruction of the crime, further questions were put to him.

When Michael walked into the Commissaire's room, followed by a gendarme, Alison gave a little cry and would have gone up to him if Martin Crow had not gently restrained her. Michael smiled and gave her a “hullo” which sadly lacked the cheeriness which was obviously intended. His dark, waving hair was ruffled, his cheeks were pale, and dark rings surrounded his eyes. As he glanced enquiringly at the row of unfamiliar faces the Commissaire motioned him to a chair beside his own, and then invited Martin Crow and Maître Corbin to put whatever questions they wished to the accused. There was a short consultation between the two men and then Crow addressed Michael.

“You are no doubt wondering, Mr. Maguire, what so many strange people are doing here,” he said. “My name is Martin Crow, and this is my daughter. You may not have noticed us the day before yesterday at the Pension Mireille where we are staying. We made the acquaintance of Miss

Beamish last evening and she confided to us your difficulties. You probably do not know my name, for you would have been a schoolboy when I appeared as defending counsel in many important trials in England. For the last few years I have interested myself in the investigation of crime, and when I heard of your arrest this morning I offered my services, for what they may be worth, to Miss Beamish."

"That was very good of you, sir," said Michael, with a nervous smile.

"I am most anxious to do what I can for you," Crow replied. "When I was told that you were not already represented by a French lawyer I went to see our Consul who has come here with us. He kindly recommended Maître Corbin who will advise you legally. For myself I can only use my wits and try to discover who committed the crime."

"I swear that I had nothing to do with it!" Michael cried, rising from his seat. "You do believe that, don't you, Alison?"

The girl was on the verge of tears.

"Of course I do. How could I believe otherwise?" she murmured.

"Thank God! I've been so afraid——" The young man left the sentence unfinished and with a gesture—as if to imply that it did not matter what he feared—sat down again.

Martin Crow and Maître Corbin conferred again

for a few moments and then the former addressed the Commissaire.

“M. Peille,” he said, speaking French, “I have just consulted Maître Corbin, who only has a very slight knowledge of English and, with your consent, my daughter will take down a shorthand report of the questions which I put to M. Maguire and the answers which he gives, and she will make a translation. Maître Corbin will then be in possession of certain facts which should assist him in preparing the defence.”

“By all means, M. Crow. If Mademoiselle, your daughter, will sit at my table she will find paper and ink at her disposal.”

M. Peille smiled at Gerry and gave her his chair. As soon as she was ready, Crow said:—

“Now, Mr. Maguire, Maître Corbin and I know all about the position between yourself, Miss Beamish and your aunt up to the time when you went to the Villa Gloria on Monday afternoon. If Maître Corbin wishes to hear anything concerning that from your own lips we can come back to it later on, so I will ask you to begin by giving an account of your arrival at the villa.” Martin Crow leant across to the lawyer and translated what he had just said. The latter nodded his approval. “Now, Mr. Maguire. Take your time and don’t be afraid of giving us details.”

Michael coughed nervously, gave everyone in the room a swift glance and then began,

"I arrived at the Villa Gloria at about four o'clock and found my aunt and her niece, Miss Trent, having tea in the garden. Miss Maguire greeted me in her usual rather formal manner and asked me if I had had a comfortable journey. She assumed that I had just come by the afternoon train."

"You had actually arrived in the morning with Miss Beamish with whom you lunched at the Pension Mireille?" Crow prompted.

"Yes. I was given tea and at about five o'clock my aunt said that she had ordered the car and that I was to drive with Miss Trent for a couple of hours. We returned to the villa at seven, dined half an hour later, and after dinner went into the library where we played three-handed Bridge. At half past nine, when we had finished a rubber, Miss Maguire said to my cousin, 'Now, if you go off to bed, darling, I can have a little business talk with Michael.' As soon as we were alone my aunt coolly informed me that she had made arrangements for me to marry Miss Trent at the British Consulate at Nice next week. Of course I was dumbfounded and——"

"One moment," interrupted Crow. "Am I right in supposing that you had previously suspected that your aunt might wish you to marry your cousin?"

"Yes, both Alison and I had come to the conclusion that she might want me to do that, but it never occurred to either of us that she would rush at it

as she did, without considering my own wishes at all. However, after making her astounding announcement she reeled off a list of Miss Trent's virtues and asked me if I did not consider her a very charming girl. I replied that I did not think my cousin's charm came into the matter and that she seemed to have forgotten that I intended marrying Miss Beamish. My aunt pretended to treat my remark as a joke and laughed. She told me not to be foolish. I reminded her that, with her approval I was actually engaged to Alison, and I was on the point of telling her that I should not consider marrying my cousin even if I were not already engaged.

“I could see that my aunt was becoming furiously angry, and was expecting an outburst from her, but she managed to control herself and silenced me with an imperious gesture. She said that she refused to hear another word from me until I had had time to consider the question very carefully. She reminded me that I was entirely dependent upon her generosity, and said that she hoped I would not compel her to cut off all supplies and remove my name from her will.”

“And did the interview end there?”

“Yes, she began to set out her Patience cards and I went up to my room. Last night we played Bridge again; as before, Miss Trent was told to go to bed; and when we were alone my aunt began by saying, ‘Well, I hope that you have considered very carefully what I said last night and have come to a reasonable

decision.' I replied that I was still of the same opinion and that nothing would induce me to marry my cousin. My aunt went deathly white and stood rigid with anger for at least a couple of minutes, then her hand shot out and pointed to the chair opposite to the one in which she always sits at the writing-table. 'Sit down!' she cried, threateningly. Thinking that it was useless to make her more furious over a trifle, I obeyed and she went across to the safe, which is in a corner of the room. She unlocked it and came back with two legal-looking documents.

" 'This is my will,' she said as she sat down, facing me. Then she went on to explain that there were two wills, one of which was executed and the other ready for her signature to be appended at any time. She unfolded the first and spread it out on the table before her. She said that it had been signed last summer and that by its terms I was to inherit Merryfields; her estate in England, and something like £50,000; and that she was leaving a similar sum and the villa to her niece, Miss Trent. She went on to explain that a previous will had left everything to me. She had made that at a time when she did not know that 'darling Coral was going to be left practically destitute'—I have used my aunt's exact words. Then she took up the second, unsigned will and said: 'This will be signed to-morrow unless you give me a solemn undertaking that you will marry Coral next week. In it I leave everything to

her, absolutely. Your name does not appear in it.’”

“I tried hard to propitiate my aunt. I asked her how she could expect me suddenly to throw Alison over and marry a girl for whom I didn’t care tuppence. She laughed, a hard, cynical laugh, and said that Miss Beamish did not concern her. I asked her why she wished me to marry my cousin, and she replied that she was not in the habit of giving her reasons for her wishes to anyone. Then, in spite of what she had just said, she told me that she intended her money and her property to remain associated with the name Maguire, of which she had always been very proud, and that she was determined that her niece should inherit both, either alone, or with the man she married, and that she was equally determined to protect her from falling into the hands of fortune-hunters.

“I then began to speak in a less conciliatory tone, and said that I wasn’t going to wreck my life just to protect Coral and to satisfy her own whim, and that I should have thought her sense of decency, to say nothing of common justice, would have prevented her from trying to force two people into a marriage against their wishes.”

“Did you know at all in what light Miss Trent regarded you?” asked Crow. Michael Maguire shrugged his shoulders.

“I really hadn’t thought about it. I suppose she was quite indifferent to me. She had never shown

any signs of being in any way attracted by me, but, of course, I hardly knew her."

"Quite. Please proceed."

"At my last remark my aunt completely lost her temper. She banged her fist upon the table and upset an inkpot; she called me selfish, ungrateful and utterly inconsiderate, and then began to write a letter to her London bank to tell them to discontinue making payments for my monthly allowance. I'm afraid I let fly at that point and told her just what I thought of her. She pretended not to be listening, and just went on writing her letter. That infuriated me still more and I took up a silver candlestick and banged it down on the desk. That seemed really to startle her. She looked up and tried to speak, but half a minute or more elapsed before she uttered a sound. 'Go,' she said, pointing towards the door, 'and be out of this villa before I am up in the morning. I never want to see you, or hear from you again. I've done with you, you ungrateful wretch.' "

Michael paused and leant back in his chair as if he were exhausted. Martin Crow asked the Commissaire if he might be given a drink of water, and after a few minutes an attendant brought some in a glass.

"I'm sorry to have to make you go over all this again," Crow said, "but it is most necessary that we should know exactly what happened."

Michael made an attempt to smile and then went on,

“I went up to my room and——”

“Forgive me for interrupting, but can you tell us how you went out, calmly or——?”

“I suppose I threw my weight about a bit. I was feeling like h—— as if I didn’t care a damn for anything or anybody. When I got upstairs I sat on my bed for—oh, I don’t know how long it was, perhaps twenty minutes or half an hour, and tried to think things out. Without my aunt’s allowance I was going to be penniless, and would be unable to take my final. My future seemed to be hopeless and I couldn’t see what I was going to do. Eventually I decided that whatever happened later I wouldn’t remain in the villa any longer and, with the intention of going down to the Pension I packed my bag. As I was on the point of letting myself out by the front door I thought I would like to tell my aunt that she could sleep without having the unpleasant thought that I was under the same roof. I left my bag in the hall and went into the library. As I opened the door I saw my aunt leaning back in her chair with blood streaming from her forehead. She was dead.”

“How did you know that?” asked Crow.

“From her attitude, and then I went up to her and found that there was no pulse.”

“Did you move the body at all?”

“No, I only touched the wrist with the tips of my fingers.”

“Yes, and what did you do then?”

"It was while I was feeling for the pulse that Boughton, the butler, came into the room and exclaimed: 'My God! What's happened?' or something like that. Then he rushed across to the windows and said: 'But who could have done it? They're both fastened.' He looked at me in a curious way and I guessed that he suspected me. He suggested that the murderer must have forced some other window and asked me to search the drawing-room and dining-room while he went round the servants' quarters. He said he had locked up everything before he went to bed, and we both found everything fastened. Then he went into the hall and telephoned to the police."

"Were the library windows shut when you were quarrelling with your aunt?"

"I couldn't say. I didn't notice."

"Or when you went back and discovered that she had been murdered?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't notice the windows at any time."

"When you were upstairs, in your room, did you hear anything which might have been a cry?"

"No. I heard nothing. I had too much to think about to pay any attention to noises."

"And did you tell the Commissaire what you have just told us?"

"Yes, as nearly as possible."

"But you did not give all that information to

the police who were first summoned to the villa?"

"I said that I had quarrelled with my aunt over some business matter."

"You did not mention the wills then?"

"No."

"Why didn't you?"

"I did not think that such details concerned the police."

"You know that someone destroyed the wills in the fire?"

"Yes, the Commissaire told me."

"Did you realise that they had been burnt when you discovered the crime?"

"No, I knew nothing about their destruction until the Commissaire questioned me about them."

"M. Peille complains that he had the greatest difficulty in getting anything out of you."

Michael sighed as if he were utterly weary.

"When you are tired, and have had a sudden shock, and then have dozens of questions fired at you through an interpreter, it is not easy to give your answers clearly and readily."

"Yes, I quite understand that," said Crow, sympathetically. "Then you can assure me that you had nothing to do with the destruction of the wills?"

"Of course I didn't," replied Michael, almost angrily.

"Has she any relatives living, besides yourself and Miss Trent?"

"Not so far as I know."

"Very well, we will leave it at that. I am sorry that I have been obliged to press you, but I wanted to make sure of your own views of the situation. I am afraid I must ask you a few more questions. How much money had you in your possession when you sat talking to your aunt last night?"

"About two hundred francs and a pound note."

"M. Peille tells me that five *mille* notes were found stuffed into your suit-case. Can you account for their presence there?"

"I can't. Someone must have put them there. I didn't."

"Do you suspect anyone of having done that?"

"I cannot imagine who would have done such a thing."

"When did Miss Trent first appear after you discovered the crime?"

"I saw her coming downstairs after I had been round the drawing-room and dining-room."

"Did she know what had happened?"

"No, she asked me what all the commotion was about and I broke the news to her."

"What did she say?"

"Not a word. She seemed to be dazed and stood perfectly still for half a minute or so. Then she moved as if she were about to go into the library,

but I stopped her and led her into the dining-room.”

“Have you any theories as to the identity of your aunt’s assailant?”

“None whatever. To me it is an inexplicable mystery.”

“Was the front door fastened when you opened it?”

“I think it was, but I wouldn’t swear to it. I was pretty well worked up at the time. I believe Boughton has told the police that he bolted it when he was shutting up the house.”

“Now, just one more question, Mr. Maguire, do you suspect, even in the smallest degree, any member of your aunt’s household?”

“I have already told you, Mr. Crow, that I suspect no one.”

Martin Crow stood up.

“Thank you,” he said. “I am sorry that I have had to trouble you so much, but I assure you that I did so in your own interests. I am afraid that you must resign yourself to being detained for some considerable time, but you can rely upon Maître Corbin and myself doing everything in our power to secure your early release.”

“It is very good of you, but I hope you remember that I have no money with which to pay for my defence.”

“That is a matter over which you need not worry, my dear fellow.” Then turning to the Commissaire,

Crow asked, "Have Mlle. Maguire's lawyers in England been communicated with?"

"Mlle. Trent has given me an address and it was my intention to visit the British Consulate directly I returned from Roquebrune to ask M. le Consul to deal with such formalities as come within his jurisdiction."

"If you will give me the name and address of the lawyer, M. Peille, I will telegraph to him at once," the Consul said.

The Commissaire searched amongst a sheaf of papers and found the one he wanted.

"I shall be obliged if you will do what is necessary, M. le Consul," he said. "And now, gentlemen, do you wish to ask the accused any further questions?"

Crow and Maître Corbin consulted for a few moments.

"Not for the present," the former said, "but I should be glad of an opportunity to view the body as soon as possible; and I should like to inspect the Villa Gloria, particularly the room where the crime was committed."

"But yes; I will write a little order to my colleague at the Commissariat at Menton and he will conduct you to the mortuary at any time," replied M. Peille as he sat down in the chair which Gerry had been occupying. "As for the villa, M. Crow, you are at liberty to go there at any time, and I will give instructions to the gendarme on duty to admit you to the library, but perhaps you would like me to

meet you there so that I can explain to you just how the body was found?"

Martin Crow accepted this invitation, and after Alison had taken leave of Michael they departed. Crow and the two girls drove back to Roquebrune where the latter were dropped, while the former went on to Menton, where he paid a visit to the mortuary.

CHAPTER VII

THE VILLA GLORIA

WHEN Martin Crow returned from Menton he was silent and preoccupied and Gerry warned Alison that it would not be judicious to question him while he was in that mood. They dined together and sat in the garden until it was time to go to bed.

"Sleep well, my dear," Crow said as he stood up and held Alison's hand; "and try not to worry too much."

"You don't think for one minute that he did it, do you?" she asked anxiously.

"My dear Miss . . . but why should we be so formal? Gerry, I notice, calls you Alison, so why shouldn't I?"

"Of course, Mr. Crow. I asked her to. I somehow feel as if I had known you both for ages. But you don't think——?"

"No, I do not; in fact I feel very certain that your Michael is the victim of a tangle of evidence which, at first sight, may go to the making of a formidable case against him; and my experience tells me that we must not belittle one single shred of that evidence. We must respect it and strive to

break it down, shred by shred. Already I can detect several flaws in the case which the police are trying to build up, and I am hoping that our visit to the Villa Gloria to-morrow will reveal more weak spots. I wonder if you would like to do a little investigating on your own account in the morning?"

Alison opened her eyes very wide.

"But what can I do, Mr. Crow?"

"Try to find out anything about Miss Maguire. You speak French?"

"A little, of sorts."

"It is probably sufficient. When I returned from Menton this evening I noticed that there are several small shops on the main road; an *épicerie*, a small estate agent's office, and the English tea-rooms. I suggest that you occupy your time buying one or two little things and chatting with the people. You might learn quite a lot over a cup of coffee at the Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds. Will you try?"

"Of course. I was rather dreading having to hang about all the morning doing nothing."

"That will be splendid, my dear, and I am sure that you can be of the greatest help."

The next morning the Commissaire telephoned to say that he would be detained in Nice for a little while and might not get over to Roquebrune much before eleven o'clock.

"But please do not wait for me," he said to Crow. "If you go on to the Villa you can, perhaps, have a

little talk with Mlle. Trent. It is possible that you may learn something of interest from her."

"Does that mean that he isn't feeling too sure of his case?" Alison asked when she heard what M. Peille had said.

"It is possible," Crow replied, "but I rather fancy that he is trying to push some of the responsibility on to my shoulders. These French police are compelled, in such cases, to take action against English people, but they don't like doing it. If they make a blunder there is too much fuss made, for their liking. Well, my dear, Gerry and I will be off and we will leave you to get to work in your own way."

The Villa Gloria stood on the right of the old tram route to Cap Martin, and its green shuttered windows looked straight across the bay to Monte Carlo. It was a large, white villa with a roof of green glazed tiles, and most of the west front was covered by a large bougainvillæa which was in full bloom. It was approached from the road by a short flight of steps which went down to the front door. The garden was large and well shaded with mimosa, pepper, olive and eucalyptus trees, and sloped steeply down to the railway line a hundred feet below. The door was opened by the butler, a tall, good-looking man of about fifty.

"I am meeting M. Peille, the Commissaire, here very shortly," Crow told him. "Will you please give my card to Miss Trent and ask her if she would be good enough to spare me a few minutes?"

The butler stood back and invited them to enter, and they found themselves in a large, white-walled hall from which a broad stone staircase, with wrought iron balusters, led with three turns to the floor above.

"If you will come into the drawing-room, sir, I will ask Miss Trent if she can see you; but may I first presume to ask if you are a friend of Mr. Michael?"

"Your surmise is correct," Crow replied, with his genial smile.

"I am glad, sir," the man said, earnestly, and then threw open the two glass doors which gave access to the salon. "It is a terrible predicament for a young gentleman to find himself in and I trust that you will be able to help him." He stood aside to allow them to enter the room. "If you will sit down, sir, I will see if Miss Trent is in the garden."

He closed the doors and stepped through one of the long windows on to the terrace.

The salon was a large room with an indifferently painted ceiling which did not seem to be in keeping with the excellent reproductions of Louis XIV chairs and settees and cabinets. Bowls and vases of flowers were everywhere, and in the fireplace there were massed a dozen or more brilliantly coloured cinerarias in pots. In addition to the doors by which they had entered the room there were glazed doors at each end, leading on one side to the dining-room, and to the library on the other. A

heavy curtain was drawn across the latter doors. After a few minutes the butler appeared at the window.

"Will you come this way, please?" he said.

Martin Crow and Gerry followed the man along the terrace and down a winding path between mimosa trees and oleander bushes to another terrace shaded by orange trees which were heavily laden with their golden fruit. A low balustrade ran the whole length of the terrace and was entwined with the trailing branches of several wistarias. At the far end two people, a young woman and a young man, were sitting beneath an old and gnarled olive tree. The former got up as Crow and Gerry approached, and advanced a few paces to meet them. She was a strange looking little person, little more than five feet in height, small limbed and round shouldered; she moved awkwardly and appeared to be intensely nervous. In spite of large and beautiful eyes she was undeniably plain.

"Good morning, Miss Trent," Martin Crow said as he raised his hat. "I am a friend of your cousin, Mr. Michael Maguire. M. Peille, the Commissaire at Nice, who is meeting me here this morning, suggested that I should come and have a little talk with you. This is my daughter, Miss Crow."

Coral Trent stared sullenly at Gerry for a moment and then thrust out her hand stiffly.

"I really don't know what I can tell you," she said, speaking with a slight colonial accent, and

fixing her large, dark eyes upon some distant object. "Won't you come and sit down?" She led the way along the terrace where the warm air was heavy with the perfume of the wistaria and the mimosa. "This is Mr. Berwick, a great friend of my poor aunt. Alan, this is Mr. Martin Crow and Miss Crow."

The young man stood up and bowed languidly. He was tall, handsome in an effeminate way, and was dressed with exaggerated care. His speech, like his movements, was slow, as if he were too tired to talk more quickly.

"Rotten business this, isn't it?" he drawled as they all sat down on the wicker arm chairs which were arranged in a semi-circle round a small garden table. He took a gold cigarette case from his hip pocket and handed it round. Only Coral accepted a cigarette.

"It is most unfortunate and very sad," Martin Crow said, addressing his remark to Coral Trent. "I offer you my sincere sympathies. It must have been a terrible shock to you."

"Yes, it was a terrible shock," the girl replied. Her eyes were now fixed upon a small green lizard which was sunning itself on the top of the balustrade, a few feet away. "I should never have thought that Michael Maguire would have been capable of doing such a thing."

"You really think that he did do it, Miss Trent?" Gerry asked.

For a moment Coral looked straight at her questioner and then turned her eyes quickly away.

"Can there be any doubt?" she asked. Her voice was hard, and made Gerry shudder.

"I think that there is very grave doubt," said Crow, speaking slowly and deliberately, "and I shall not rest until I have proved conclusively that he is either innocent or guilty."

"I say, are you a detective?" asked the young man, bluntly.

Crow looked at him for a moment without speaking.

"I am Michael Maguire's friend," he replied at length; then he turned sharply to Coral. "I understand, Miss Trent, that your aunt wished you to marry your cousin?"

A second's hesitation, then,

"Yes, she did."

As she replied she again permitted herself to look straight at her interrogator, then she turned her gaze back to the lizard which had come down the side of the balustrade. During the brief moment when their eyes met Crow fancied that he saw fear in hers.

"Was it your wish that you and he should marry?" he asked.

"Oh no."

"Then why did your aunt wish it?"

Coral did not reply. She had turned her attention to a train which was going round the sharp curve towards the station of Cap-Martin-Roquebrune.

"Just some odd fancy on the part of Miss Maguire,

I imagine," Alan Berwick volunteered. "She was full of queer ideas which nobody could understand."

"You knew her intimately?" Crow asked. There was a perceptible pause before the young man replied.

"Oh, rather. Known her ever since I was a kid," he said. "She and my mater are neighbours in England."

"Would you describe her as a normal woman?"

Alan closed his eyes and puffed at his cigarette as he considered the question.

"That isn't exactly an easy question to answer, Mr. Crow," he replied at last. "This business of her wanting her nephew and niece to marry doesn't strike one as being exactly normal because there didn't seem to be any sense in it. But Miss Maguire was a woman who got an idea into her head and there it stuck, and no amount of arguing would shift it; in fact any opposition seemed to make her all the more determined. She always went off the deep end if anyone opposed her."

"Did you always get on well with her, Mr. Berwick?"

Alan gave Crow a suspicious glance.

"Oh rather. Like a house on fire," he said with a meaningless laugh as he threw away his cigarette end and dived into his pocket for his case.

"As he told you just now, Mr. Berwick has known my aunt ever since he was a child," Coral put in.

"And when did you first know that she wanted you to marry your cousin?" Crow asked.

"About ten days ago."

"Did she tell you or did you find out?"

"She told me."

"What did she say?"

"She said that she had decided that he and I should marry and that I was to go over to the British Consulate at Nice with her and give notice to the Consul. And she said that Michael would be coming down very shortly."

"Were you surprised, Miss Trent?"

"Very surprised."

"What reply did you make?"

"I think I said 'Oh yes,' or something like that."

"But were you prepared to marry him?" asked Crow with marked surprise in his tone. There was a long silence. They were all looking at Coral expectantly. She was watching the train which had left the station and was winding its way along the twisting stretch of line towards Monte Carlo. It was Alan Berwick who broke the silence.

"I don't think you ever thought that there was any possibility of the marriage coming off, did you?" he asked.

"No, I suppose I didn't," the girl answered after another pause. "I knew that he wanted to marry Miss Beamish."

"Can you tell me why Miss Maguire suddenly changed her attitude towards Miss Beamish?"

"No, I cannot tell you."

"I understand that your aunt was very devoted to you?"

"Yes, I suppose she was."

"And were you fond of her, Miss Trent?"

"She was very good to me."

"You have only been living with her for a comparatively short time?"

"A little more than a year."

"Had you seen much of her before that?"

"I had never seen her until she came out to Australia in——" Coral hesitated and appeared to be making a mental calculation. "I suppose it was in 1927."

"What did she go to Australia for?"

"To visit us. My mother and she were sisters. My father was alive then and we had a big sheep farm about five hundred miles from Sydney."

"And she stayed with you?" Crow asked.

"Yes, for about two months."

"And then returned to England?"

"Not immediately. She travelled about for several weeks."

"Did you see her again after she left you?"

"No."

"And what made you come and live with her?"

Another pause, and again the young man supplied the information.

"Miss Trent's mother died suddenly."

"Now let us assume, Miss Trent, that your cousin

had nothing whatever to do with your aunt's death, is there anyone whom you suspect, even in the smallest degree, of having any reason to wish for her death?"

"There is no one that I can think of," Coral replied.

"And you, Mr. Berwick, is there anyone you can suggest who might have thought that he, or she, would benefit by Miss Maguire's death?"

The young man shook his head several times before he answered.

"I can't think of anyone," he said.

"Did she know many people here?"

"She has made no friends in Roquebrune," said Coral.

"Has Mr. Berwick been the only visitor to the villa?"

Crow noticed that the girl and Alan exchanged glances before the latter replied;

"Yes, I suppose I was," he said.

"And I understand, Miss Trent, that you and your cousin were Miss Maguire's only relatives?"

"That is what she always told me," Coral replied. "She——" The girl broke off as she saw the butler coming along the terrace followed by M. Peille who was mopping his bald head with a large, coloured handkerchief.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LIBRARY

THE Commissaire bowed and shook hands with Coral Trent, who introduced him awkwardly to Alan Berwick. After making a few remarks about the "enchanted garden," the "superb view," and the "magnificent weather," he asked Martin Crow if he would like to inspect the library.

"And who is the young friend of Mademoiselle?" he asked as they walked up to the villa.

"He was presented to us as an old friend of Mlle. Maguire," Crow told him.

The Frenchman smiled. "Ah, perhaps we have a little romance there, no?" he asked.

"I think we will hear what my daughter has to say on that point, M. Peille. She has a remarkable capacity for sensing things; in fact I find myself relying more and more upon her judgment. Well, Gerry, what is your opinion?"

"I should say that she is rather attracted by him," answered the girl in French, "but I very much doubt if her feelings are reciprocated."

"Apparently he does not mind spending a lovely morning in her company when he might be sunning

himself on the Casino terraces, or watching the tennis at the Country Club," replied Crow.

"You seem to forget that she is an heiress."

M. Peille laughed.

"Ah, Mademoiselle is shrewd," he exclaimed as they entered the hall of the villa. "Eh bien, it is of no consequence to us." He knocked upon the door immediately on the right of the entrance and after a couple of seconds it was thrown open by a gendarme. "We shall be in here for some time," the Commissaire told the man. "You can wait in the vestibule."

"Bien, Monsieur."

"This," said M. Peille with a sweep of his hand as they entered the room, "is the library where the crime was committed."

It was a large, luxuriously furnished room. Immediately opposite the door there were two long windows which opened on to the terrace. Through these could be seen the rose entwined pergola columns and the wide sweep of the bay beyond, with Monte Carlo cowering beneath the huge mass of the Tête du Chien in the distance. To the left were the glass doors which gave direct access to the salon; and to the right was the fireplace surmounted by a large overmantel. In the centre of the room was a large writing-table with high-backed arm chairs on either side of it, one facing the door, the other facing the windows. A little to the right of the latter chair there was a large standard electric lamp.

A single silver candlestick stood on the left side of the writing-table which was of mahogany and richly inlaid with brass.

Martin Crow paused by the door and allowed his eyes to wander slowly round the room. After a few moments they came to rest for a few seconds upon a mass of charred paper which was scattered over the hearth, then they moved on to the tall bookcases filled with elegantly bound volumes, to the windows which were hung with heavy curtains, and then to the safe which stood on a small stand in a corner of the room, on the left of the door.

"Mlle. Maguire was found sitting in that chair, facing the windows," M. Peille explained as he stepped up to the writing-table, "and the accused was standing at her left side when Boughton entered the room. The candlestick with which the blow was struck, was lying on the floor a few centimetres from his left foot. Over there you will see all that remains of Mademoiselle's testamentary documents, and there, on your left is the safe from which, according to the accused, they were taken by Mademoiselle herself."

"How was she sitting in the chair?" Crow asked.

M. Peille took a large envelope from his overcoat pocket and from it he extracted three enlarged photographs.

"These were taken during the night of the murder, by flashlight," he said. "One from the front and one from each side. They show exactly how the unfortunate woman was found."

Martin Crow took the photographs and examined them closely by the window. They depicted a tall, slim, hard-featured woman of about sixty, leaning back in the chair with her head thrown forward upon her chest and tilted a little towards the left shoulder. She was sitting square with the edge of the writing-table and her hands had fallen over the arms of the chair. On the right temple there was a wound from which, it could be clearly seen, the blood had flowed freely down the side of her face and on to the bodice of her dress.

"I fear they do not tell us very much," remarked the Commissaire as Crow went back to the table and stood for a few seconds in each of the three positions which the camera must have occupied. "I always make a point of photographing the body as soon as possible, especially when I have good reason for supposing that it has not been moved."

"You do not think it was moved in this case?" asked Crow, looking up.

"We have the assurance of both the accused and Boughton that the body was not moved. The former, as you know, said that he put his fingers on the wrist and felt for the pulse, but he was emphatic that the position had not been altered; and I think that he was speaking the truth. The position of the body is, exactly, as I should have expected to find it under the circumstances."

"There is no question of the Brigadier, or any of his men having moved it?"

"Of that I am certain, Monsieur. You consider the point of importance?"

"Of the greatest importance, M. Peille. I wonder if you could let me have copies of these photographs?"

"Most certainly. You may keep those. I have two other sets in my bureau. They interest you?"

"Yes, they confirm a theory which I formed yesterday after I had viewed the body."

"May I ask what your theory is, M. Crow?"

"For the moment, M. Peille, I would prefer not to answer that question because I may be entirely wrong. To-morrow, perhaps, I shall have something definite to tell you."

"But of course, it is as you wish," replied the Commissaire, with a touch of disappointment in his tone. "You observe that there is only one candlestick on the table. We have the other, which is identical, at the Commissariat. We have photographed that also."

"Ah! I should very much like to see those photographs."

"Assuredly. Any time that you may call at my office I shall be most happy to show them to you. I meant to have brought them with me, but I departed in such a hurry that I forgot them."

Martin Crow bent down and examined the polished surface of the table with his magnifying glass.

"I see that there are several finger-prints here," he observed.

"Yes, and we found others on the back of the chair in which Mademoiselle was sitting. They were all made by the accused, as the photographs conclusively prove."

"Did you find any others anywhere else in the room?"

"Only on the candlestick."

"And the safe, M. Peille, did that disclose anything of interest?"

"A few private letters written to Mademoiselle; her cheque-book, her bank pass-book; and a few letters and documents relating to her investments and property in England. Would it interest you to look through them?"

"Yes, it would," replied Crow.

The Commissaire went across to the safe and Martin Crow joined his daughter who was examining the fastening of one of the windows.

"What is interesting you, my dear?" he asked.

Gerry looked up and smiled.

"Nothing special," she told him. "I was just looking to see how these worked. They seem to be quite ordinary. I'll prow! round while you amuse yourself going through those papers."

"Very well. I don't suppose I shall be very long, then we'll look at the rooms upstairs," Crow said as he went back to the writing-table where the Commissaire was arranging the contents of the safe.

"These," M. Peille said, indicating a neat little bundle of papers which were held together by an

elastic band, "all relate to Mlle. Maguire's investments." He handed them to Crow who glanced at each one separately and then laid them aside without making any comment. "Now here," went on the Commissaire, "is a letter addressed to Mademoiselle by her defunct sister. It does not appear to be of any particular interest."

Crow took the letter and read it. It had been written eighteen months previously at a time when Coral's mother appeared to have known that she was about to die. She begged her sister to look after Coral who, she said, would be left with only sufficient money to provide the barest necessities. She said that her husband had met with a long run of bad luck and had died leaving her—Mrs. Trent—with a small annuity which would cease at her death. Mrs. Trent anxiously suggested that Miss Maguire should have the parentless Coral to live with her and pointed out that the girl could fulfil the duties of secretary-companion.

"And this is Mademoiselle's cheque-book," M. Peille said as soon as Crow had finished reading the letter. "You will see by the last counterfoil that she drew a cheque for six thousand francs on Tuesday last, the day that she met her death. As I told you yesterday, Mlle. Trent informed us that her aunt changed one of the *mille* notes while she was shopping in Monte Carlo on Tuesday morning. We have searched this room, Mlle. Maguire's bedroom, in fact the whole villa has been searched and we

found no money except a few odd notes of ten and one hundred francs, apart from the five *mille* in the valise of the accused, of course. This morning I interviewed the bank manager at Monte Carlo, and with the assistance of the cashier we discovered that those five notes had certainly been paid out on Tuesday morning. We could not prove that those actual ones had been handed to Mlle. Maguire, but I think that you will agree that it would be a remarkable fact if they had been paid to anyone else. You question that, M. Crow?"

"Not at all, M. Peille, but to tell you the truth I am not greatly interested in the point. I do not think that it is of much importance."

"But if those actual notes were handed to Mlle. Maguire it is very strong evidence against the accused."

"Well, you may be right," admitted Crow, somewhat disinterestedly. "Ah! Is this the pass-book?" Crow sat down and gave it his careful attention for several minutes while the Commissaire returned the papers which they had already examined to the safe.

"You find something of importance?" he asked as he observed Crow making notes in his pocket-book.

"I cannot say at the moment, but it may be quite important. I——"

"Father, could you spare a moment to look at something over here?" Gerry called out. She had gone on to the terrace and was examining something

on the extreme edge of one of the windows. Crow got up and went out to her. "I wonder if M. Peille has seen that?" she said, indicating a faint fingerprint on the glass.

Crow knelt down and scrutinised it closely. After a few moments he called to the Commissaire who came out and looked a little disconcerted when he was shown the mark.

"No, I admit that it escaped our notice," he said. "It is probably of no consequence, but I will telephone to Menton at once for the photographer to come and take it. You excuse me a little minute?"

M. Peille went into the hall.

"Have you come across anything important, Father?" Gerry asked.

"I'm not quite sure, my dear. Perhaps I have. I am going to have a look at that charred paper in there," he said as he went into the room. He knelt down in front of the fireplace and, with the greatest care turned the black flakes over with the point of a pencil. He lifted some of them and laid them on the palm of his hand but they were broken too small for any writing to be discernible, even with the aid of his magnifying glass. All that he could tell was that the paper had probably been heavy, of the type that lawyers use for engrossing documents. Presently M. Peille returned.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he saw what Crow was doing. "I fear that you will not learn much from that."

"No, I'm afraid not. May we trouble you to let us see the upstairs rooms?"

"By all means."

They went upstairs and Martin Crow made a rough sketch in his note-book showing the position of the principal rooms. Miss Maguire had occupied the one immediately over the library; Coral's was next door, opposite the top of the stairs; Michael had had the room at the end of the corridor, next to his cousin's and opposite Boughton's. There was another guest room and two other servant's rooms, but these did not greatly interest Crow, who presently thanked M. Peille and said that he would not detain him any longer.

"You have seen anything which may help you?" the Commissaire asked as they went downstairs.

"A good deal, M. Peille."

"And you have arrived at any conclusions?"

"I am more than ever convinced that Michael Maguire did not kill his aunt," Crow replied.

"And yet you will admit that the evidence against him is strong?"

"Strong, but far from conclusive, M. Peille."

"He was in an unfortunate position," persisted the Commissaire. "He had everything to gain by his aunt's death and everything to lose if she lived. In fact his position was desperate."

"That is correct," Crow admitted, "but it is not proof, M. Peille, and I demand proof."

CHAPTER IX

THEORIES

AS Martin Crow and Gerry went out of the front door they were met by Coral Trent.

"I was hoping that I should catch you before you left," she said with a little less restraint and nervousness than she had displayed when they had been talking in the garden. "Can you tell me what is going to happen here, Mr. Crow?"

"In what way, Miss Trent?"

"To me, the villa, and the servants," she replied, shortly.

"The British Consul at Nice has communicated with you raunt's lawyers in London," Crow told her, "and I am afraid you will have to wait until he arrives before you can know what your position is going to be."

"I see." Coral was silent for half a minute during which time she stood gazing up at the campanile of the village church, a hundred and fifty feet up the mountainside. The angelus was being rung. "M. Peille said something about my aunt's will having been destroyed," she added.

"Yes, it appears that someone destroyed it on the evening of the . . . when the crime was committed."

"Aunt Jennifer told me several times that she was leaving this villa and half her fortune to me," the girl said.

"Yes, I believe she told your cousin the same," replied Crow.

"Then won't I get it now that the will has been burnt?"

"That is a question which I cannot possibly answer; and to be perfectly candid, Miss Trent," Crow went on in a sharper tone, "it is a question which does not concern me at all. For the moment I am only interested in proving that your cousin did not kill your aunt."

"You do not think he did it?"

"No, I am certain he did not. And now, Miss Trent, we will wish you good morning."

They left Coral standing in the doorway, a strange little figure, somehow pathetic in spite of her seeming callousness, and unconcern except so far as the situation affected herself. Martin Crow walked up the steps to the road in silence and Gerry refrained from asking him any questions. As they turned out of the gate they came face to face with Alan Berwick who appeared to be surprised at meeting them.

"Oh, I thought you'd pushed off long ago," he said amiably. "Going down the hill?" he asked.

"We are returning to the Pension Mireille," said Crow, who was convinced that he had been waiting about in the road for them to come out of the villa.

"I'm going that way too. Well, did you have any luck in there?"

"Luck?"

"Make any discoveries, and all that sort of thing?"

"I made several discoveries which interested me greatly," Crow answered, giving the young man a sideways glance. "But it remains to be seen whether they will prove helpful. You are staying in Roquebrune, Mr. Berwick?"

"Yes, rather; at the Pension des Bambous. You know, just beyond your place, on the bend of the road. I've been rather seedy lately and the doctor turned me out of England for the winter and sent me down here for a rest and a bit of sunshine. Topping spot, don't you think?"

"You are fortunate to be able to take a holiday," Crow said, ignoring the question.

"Yes. I suppose I am really. Luckily it isn't an absolute necessity for me to keep my nose to the grindstone, but this sort of thing, of course, makes a bit of a mess of one's career. I say, you'll excuse my asking, won't you, but are you *the* Martin Crow, K.C., by any chance?"

"I am."

"By Jove, that's great! I've heard of you scores of times, of course. I'm a barrister, but I haven't really had a chance to get going properly, what with this rotten old chest of mine, and one thing and another."

"You have been staying here for some time?"

"Practically all the winter."

"Then I suppose you have been seeing a good deal of Miss Maguire and Miss Trent?"

There was a slight hesitation before the young man answered.

"Oh yes, I've been in and out of the villa all the time, you know."

"Tell me, Mr. Berwick, what do you really think about this case? Have you ever met Michael Maguire?"

"Two or three times in England. I think I told you that his aunt was a neighbour of my mother's. I saw him now and again when he went to Merryfields for week-ends."

"And do you think that he killed his aunt?"

Alan Berwick was lighting a cigarette and did not answer for several moments.

"Well, that's a bit of a poser, Mr. Crow," he said at length. "From what I hear he seems to have been a pretty hot tempered sort of fellow, and I understand that Miss Maguire was trying to force him into a marriage against his will, but I don't know if that is sufficient evidence on which to condemn him. What do you think?"

"It is not, Mr. Berwick. And have you known Miss Trent for some time?"

"Only since last summer when she and Miss Maguire returned from the Continent and spent a few weeks at Merryfields."

"You saw a good deal of her in England?"

"Oh yes, quite a lot."

"And it is your wish to marry her?" asked Crow in a casual tone. The question appeared to surprise the young man, who stood still and looked perplexed.

"Good Lord! Whatever made you think that I wanted to marry her?" he asked, with an awkward laugh.

"I apologise if I have given offence in any way, but I thought——"

"You haven't offended me," Berwick said genially, as he fell into step again, "it just struck me as being deuced odd that you should have thought that I wanted to. No, sir, Miss Trent is a very decent sort, and all that, but she's hardly my type, you know."

"Did she get on with Miss Maguire?"

"Oh, I suppose she did in a way, but the old girl must have been the very devil to live with."

"In what way?"

"Well, she was full of cranky ideas and used to get terribly rattled if anyone opposed her."

"Was that your own experience of her?"

"No. I always took jolly good care to agree with what she said. I don't see the object of getting the wrong side of people if you can keep on the right side. Do you?"

"No, I suppose you are right." They had reached the point where the path to the station led away from the road by the side of the electrician's shop.

"We will leave you here," Crow said. "No doubt we shall meet again."

"Rather. Give me a ring, Mr. Crow, if you think I can help you in any way. Pension des Bambous, you know."

Martin Crow thanked him and then followed Gerry into the garden, where they found Alison struggling to make herself understood by Mlle. Antoinette.

"You have news of M. Maguire?" the latter asked.

"We have not seen him to-day."

"But you have been up to the villa?"

Crow laughed.

"I suppose I never stir but what I am watched by some curious person," he said. "Yes, we have been to the villa, Mademoiselle, but I am afraid I have no news."

The girl went indoors, disappointed. A few moments later she came out to say that M. Crow was wanted on the telephone. It was the British Consul speaking. He had just received a telegram from Mr. Stephen Chart, Miss Maguire's lawyer, to say that he would be arriving the next day by the Blue Train. After a short discussion it was arranged that Crow should meet him at Monte Carlo—the train does not stop at Roquebrune—and that everyone concerned with the case should meet at the Villa Gloria at half past two.

"Well, my dear Alison, and what luck have you had this morning?" Crow asked as he joined the two girls at the luncheon table in the little arbour.

"Not very much, I'm afraid," Alison replied, rather disappointedly. "The local people, who seem to be mostly Italians speaking a queer sort of French, have practically nothing to say about Miss Maguire beyond the fact that she was not what they call *sympathique*. At the Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds I learnt a little more, but not a great deal. Miss Maguire was in the habit of buying all her cakes there, and occasionally went in for tea, or morning coffee, with Miss Trent. They say that she was always very stiff, and gave them the impression of being a regular martinet. They talked of the girl as always looking crushed, as if she were perpetually afraid of her aunt."

"Any information about the servants at the villa?" asked Crow.

"No, except that the butler sometimes went for the cakes which Miss Maguire had ordered and that he struck them as being a typical example of the perfect, discreet manservant. I'm afraid that is all, Mr. Crow."

"Well, my dear, I don't know that we have discovered very much more, but I am hoping that we may learn something really helpful from the lawyer when he comes to-morrow. I think you did admirably. Slight impressions like that often prove to be of the greatest importance."

As soon as they had finished their meal Crow said that he was going to rest for an hour and suggested that the two girls should go over to Menton for tea

later on. As they got up from the table he made a sign to Gerry who, after a few minutes, followed him up to his room.

"I thought that we might compare notes and see how we stand," Crow said as his daughter came into the room. "Alison doesn't seem to be too despondent."

"She has terrific faith in us, Father. I don't know what she would have done if we hadn't been here."

"Poor girl. She makes a brave effort to appear cheerful under most difficult circumstances. Well, my dear, what are your impressions after our visit to the villa?"

Gerry lighted a cigarette and remained silent for some minutes. She was standing by the open window watching a high-speed motor-boat as it approached the shore in front of the Case del Mare.

"I'm afraid my impressions are rather muddled at present," she said after a while. "I found Miss Trent hopelessly baffling, and I can't decide whether she is quite undeveloped and childish, or a good deal sharper than she appears to be."

"Yes, she is a strange little creature," said Crow, meditatively.

"In some ways," Gerry went on, "she seems to be utterly callous, and yet I don't believe that she is really so hard as she might lead one to suppose. This morning there were times when I thought she was a simpleton who could not grasp the seriousness

of the situation; and there were moments when I thought that she was deep and was trying to mislead us. How did she strike you, Father?"

"She is not a simpleton, Gerry."

"But was she concealing something from us?"

"That is very probable. And what did you make of the young man?"

"Oh, he is of a different colour altogether," declared Gerry. "I took an instant dislike to him. He was far too affable and too plausible. As I said in the garden, when we were walking up to the villa with M. Peille, I imagine that she is very much in love with him, but I don't think that he is with her."

"You put him down as a fortune hunter?"

"Yes, that probably describes him pretty accurately. I should say that he has sufficient means to enable him to scrape along, but he is of the type that needs pots and pots of money. As for what he said about being down here for his health, and his feeble whine about his career suffering, I didn't believe a word of it. Careers don't stand for anything with the Alan Berwicks of this world. All he wants is to get a good kick out of life without having to work for it."

Martin Crow chuckled.

"Your language is certainly expressive, my dear," he said, "but aren't we feeling a little vindictive?"

"Perhaps we are. He got my back up. Do you agree with me about him, Father, or did it go down with you?"

"No, my dear, it did not go down, and I am inclined to agree with what you have said about both of them, but I am not sure that his undesirable character—as we imagine it—affects our case very much."

"Unless he had a hand, either directly, or indirectly, in Miss Maguire's death," said Gerry, sharply.

"Ah! So that is how your mind is working. Well, I admit that it is a possibility which I had not overlooked. As for Miss Trent, I must say that neither her manner nor her conversation inspired me with confidence in her, especially when we were coming away and she talked so anxiously about her aunt's will, and what her own position was going to be. She is manifestly very little affected by the actual loss of her aunt, but how far her manner is genuine, and how much is pose—put on for some specific purpose—I am not prepared to say. She is, indeed, a strange personality and, as far as I am concerned, an unattractive one."

"They were both waiting about to catch us as we left," Gerry declared.

"Yes, I fancy that we aroused the curiosity of them both when we were sitting in the garden. Then do you conclude that he committed the crime and that she was an accessory?"

"I think that both are possibilities which we should consider very carefully."

"And what do you suggest as their motive?"

"Isn't it more than likely that she and Berwick wanted to marry, in spite of his denial, that they met with strong opposition from Miss Maguire and could not afford to defy her?"

"Yes, that is quite likely. And what part do you think she may have played?"

"Assuming that they had plotted to kill Miss Maguire I suspect that she may have admitted Berwick, perhaps before dinner, and concealed him somewhere; possibly in the salon from where he could have overheard the quarrel between aunt and nephew. Then there is the possibility that the butler might have assisted them."

"Yes, that has already occurred to me," Crow said. "I think that we must have a little talk with that fellow. I thought of doing so this morning, and then decided that I would wait a little and tackle him casually some time. I thought that his interest in Michael Maguire sounded rather forced. Didn't you?"

"I didn't notice. Then if he and Coral Trent were in the plot either of them could have slipped those notes into Maguire's suit-case."

"Quite easily, I should imagine," Crow agreed. "Of course they could not have foreseen that Maguire would come downstairs with the suit-case, and leave it so conveniently in the hall. They probably planned to stuff the notes into one of the drawers in his room, or into one of his pockets. Now we come to the destruction of the wills, and that seems to present

a difficulty if we are going to suspect Berwick and Coral Trent. With the executed document in existence they stood to get a large fortune, so what object could they have had in burning it?"

Gerry considered the question for some moments before she answered.

"I don't know," she said, presently, "unless they hoped that Michael would be convicted of the murder and executed, in which case Coral, I suppose, would inherit the whole fortune."

"A little too far fetched, I think," said Crow, shaking his head. "You seem to have overlooked the fact that by doing that they would have been running a very grave and unwarranted risk, the risk of Michael getting off and then inheriting everything as his aunt's next-of-kin. No, I cannot see them destroying a document which gave them anything between £50,000 and £100,000, on the off chance—a very thin chance—of getting double that amount."

"I suppose you are satisfied that Michael is innocent?"

"Absolutely, my dear. In my opinion the burning of those wills is a point in his favour. If he had killed his aunt I am certain that he would not have wasted time throwing those wills into the fire and breaking up the charred paper. If he had waited to do anything he would surely have taken steps to remove any finger-prints from the candlestick and furniture. Moreover, I think he would have opened one of the

salon windows, when he went in there, if he had been guilty."

"Wouldn't that argument apply to anyone?" asked Gerry.

"To some extent, and therefore I am convinced that the destruction of the wills was of enormous importance to the murderer; as important as Miss Maguire's death."

"And what does that lead to?"

"The assumption that the murderer was some person who knew that he, or she, would receive nothing at all while the executed will was in existence, but regarded himself as Miss Maguire's next-of-kin and therefore reckoned on inheriting everything if no will could be found."

"But Michael and Coral Trent appear to be Miss Maguire's only relatives?" Gerry objected.

"Yes, so far as our information goes at present," replied Crow, "but that is a point which we have got to go into very carefully with the lawyer. And there is something else that I want to ask him. In Miss Maguire's pass-book I came across four entries, extending over the last twelve months, showing that on each of the last quarter days her account in London has been debited with the sum of £125. Those four sums were transferred to an English bank in Nice."

"Oh, is that what you were making notes about in the library this morning?"

"Yes. Of course they may have been in respect

of a pension to some old servant, but Miss Maguire does not seem to have been very generous, and I don't think that she would make an allowance of £500 a year to anyone of that kind. It is just possible that the payments were made to some distant relative of whom Michael had never heard; a brother, or perhaps, another nephew."

"This is interesting, Father."

"It is decidedly interesting, my dear. I had intended going over to Nice this afternoon to make enquiries at the bank, but I think I shall wait until we have had a talk with Mr. Stephen Chart. Moreover, I have something rather important to do this afternoon."

"What is that?"

"I am going to consult Dr. Aristide Journet."

"Who on earth is he?"

"A noted pathologist who, I am hoping, may be able to give me some assistance," said Crow as he got up and took his hat from the chest of drawers. "You are going to take Alison to tea at Menton, aren't you? I don't suppose I shall be back much before dinner time."

CHAPTER X

DR. ARISTIDE JOURNET'S OPINION

“**B**UT yes, my dear M. Crow, I shall be delighted to assist you,” Dr. Aristide Journet said over the telephone when Martin Crow had recalled their meeting, five years previously, over the *affaire Jehnan*, “What is it that I can do for you?”

“I want you to examine a body and give me your valuable opinion.”

“I am at your service.”

“I must make it clear, Dr. Journet, that I am consulting you professionally, in the strictest sense. When could you spare a couple of hours to come over to Menton?”

“One moment, please I can be at Menton at five o'clock this evening.”

“That is splendid. May I suggest that we meet at the mortuary? I will be waiting outside for you.”

“Understood, M. Crow. I shall be there.”

It was not yet three o'clock, Martin Crow walked leisurely along the old tram route towards Cap Martin and went down through the olive groves which lead to Carnoles, and from there made his way along the Promenade to Menton where

he visited the police official who had accompanied him to the mortuary on the previous day.

Punctually at five Dr. Journet, a dark, spectacled little man, with a fussy, effusive manner, drove up to the mortuary entrance and greeted Martin Crow as if they were life-long friends.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed. "Is it really five years since we met over that extraordinary case? But it only seems like a few weeks since the Côte d'Azur was all agog over the disappearance of that extraordinary man. Well, my friend, and what is it that occupies your attention now; the *affaire* of the Villa Gloria?"

"Yes, you have guessed correctly, Doctor," replied Crow. "Shall we go in so that I can explain what it is I want to know? Afterwards I am going to ask you to be good enough to come along to the villa, so we will not waste any time."

The police officer unlocked the door and they passed into a small, cold vestibule and then went down a short passage and into a large, whitewashed chamber. In the centre of this room the body of Miss Jennifer Maguire lay upon a marble slab, covered with a heavy black cloth which the official pulled back so that it revealed the head.

"I want you to examine that wound, Dr. Journet," said Crow, "and then tell me if you can form any opinion as to the manner in which it was inflicted."

"I understand from the newspapers that she was struck with a heavy silver candlestick."

"Yes, that, I think is, unquestionably, correct, but there are many different ways of handling a candlestick, and that is where I want your opinion."

The doctor walked round to the right side of the body and examined the wound closely, touching the flesh of the forehead lightly with the tips of his fingers. Presently he stood erect.

"I should say that the candlestick was of fair size, perhaps thirty centimetres in length, and weighing at least a kilo, with a round and rather flat base," he said.

"From what do you assume all that, doctor?"

"From the depth of the wound, chiefly. Am I correct?"

"I have neither measured nor weighed the candlestick but I do not think that your figures are far out," Crow replied. "As regards the base it is, as you say, round and flat, with rather a sharp edge. Now, before we go to the villa I shall be glad if you will take very careful note of the angle at which the blow was struck. You will see that the groove made by the rim of the candlestick is approximately parallel to a line drawn between the corner of the right eye and the point where the top of the ear is attached; and is about one centimetre above that line."

"Yes, yes, that is correct. The skull is, of course, fractured at that point."

"As I suspected; but I do not think that the fracture itself interests me very much. It is the

direction of the blow which may make all the difference to my case."

"I understand, Monsieur, and I have made a careful note of it."

"Then let us get away to the Villa Gloria," Crow said, and a quarter of an hour later they were being admitted to the library by the gendarme who was still on duty and had received orders from the Commissaire to allow Crow to enter the room at any time.

"It happened here?" asked Dr. Aristide Journet, as he glanced round the room.

"Yes, Mlle. Maguire was sitting in that chair, with her back to the door, and the blow was struck with a candlestick which forms a pair with the one you see standing on the table. Now, here I have three photographs which were taken by the police two or three hours after the murder was committed, and the Commissaire is satisfied that they show the exact position into which the body fell after the blow was struck. He is assured that the body was not moved by anyone, but whether that is correct I am not prepared to say. However, I shall be glad if you will look at these photographs, recall to mind the exact shape, size and position of the wound, and then tell me if anything occurs to you."

Dr. Journet studied the prints carefully for several minutes.

"No, I cannot say that they suggest anything unusual to my mind," he said at length. "I assume

from them that the murderer was standing here, on this side of the table, facing his victim; and that the blow was struck across the table."

"Exactly, exactly!" exclaimed Crow excitedly. He believed that Dr. Journet was going to give him the opinion for which he hoped. "But will you please show me, with that candlestick, how, in your view, the blow was struck?"

The doctor took up the candlestick, raised it above his right shoulder and then swung it slowly downwards so that it would have hit anyone sitting in the chair.

"Of course the murderer did it quickly, and used great force," he observed.

"Yes, of that there is no doubt," said Crow, "but I do not think he did it quite like that."

"How did he do it?"

Crow took the candlestick from the doctor and demonstrated with it.

"Is not that what I did?" asked Dr. Journet.

"You used your right hand and I used my left," replied Crow.

"But I do not understand."

"Please look again at the photograph which was taken from across the table," said Crow. "Now, Doctor, I am assuming, as you did, that the murderer stood here, facing Mlle. Maguire. Had he been standing to the right of the table he could not have struck that blow which fell on the further side of the head; and that standard lamp prevented

him from striking the blow from the left side of the table. Moreover, unless the position of that candlestick was afterwards changed, he picked up the one on his left, an unlikely thing for a right-handed man to do. And it is my opinion, M. le Docteur, that a man using his right hand would naturally have struck at the left temple of his victim; and conversely, a man using his left hand would have aimed at the right temple."

"Yes, yes, there is reason in what you say."

"Then there is another interesting point," Crow went on, "Look at the angle which the wound makes. It is almost horizontal and I should have expected it to be very nearly perpendicular if it had been caused by a right-handed swing across to the right side of the head. Don't you agree with me?"

"What you say sounds reasonable enough," the doctor admitted, "but I should not like to swear on oath that the unfortunate woman was struck by a left-handed man; and that, I presume is what you are trying to establish?"

"I am. Then you do agree that the evidence before us indicates a left-handed rather than a right-handed blow."

"Yes, but I should not like to see a man go to the guillotine on that evidence alone."

"Neither should I," admitted Crow. "But I am not concerned with sending anyone to the guillotine; my task is to prove the innocence of a young man who has been charged with the crime."

"Which hand does he use naturally?"

"I cannot say, but I shall very soon find out."

"From the newspapers I understand that his fingerprints were found on the candlestick?"

"His explanation is that he was handling it while he sat here arguing with his aunt."

"No other finger-prints were found on it?"

"I believe not."

"You have examined the candlestick, M. Crow?"

"Not yet. When you return to Nice I will ask you to be so kind as to let me accompany you. M. Peille, the Commissaire has photographs of it and I am certainly hoping that I may learn something from them."

"By all means, I shall be delighted to have your company, M. Crow."

"Then before we go would you mind recording your conclusions in writing; that is to say that you consider, from the evidence, that the candlestick was wielded by a left handed person."

"But I cannot definitely commit myself to that extent," said the doctor.

"I understand that, but will you set it forth as an opinion?"

Dr. Journet sat down at the writing table and began writing. He considered every sentence carefully before he wrote it, and a quarter of an hour elapsed before he handed the paper to Crow.

"I have this day examined the body of Mlle. Maguire at the mortuary at Menton. I paid special attention to the depth, shape and exact position of the wound. Subsequently I visited the Villa Gloria and was shown police photographs of the body as it was found, also the chair in which the defunct woman was sitting when she met her death.

"From my observations I am of the opinion that the murderer struck Mlle. Maguire while he was standing immediately opposite to her, across the writing table, and there are several indications that the weapon was held in the left hand. While I am not prepared to state as a certainty that a left-handed blow was struck, I base my conclusions upon the following:—

"Position of wound.

"Angle at which the wound lies upon the forehead.

"The fact that I should have expected a right-handed man to take up the candlestick which was nearest to that hand.

"ARISTIDE JOURNET."

"I am much indebted to you, M. le Docteur," said Crow when he read it through. "And now, if I may, I will accompany you to Nice.

During the drive along the Moyenne Corniche the two men did not refer to the crime but talked of the Riviera scenery, the winter sports resorts in the mountains, and the hard struggle which the hotel-keepers were having to fight against the *crise mondiale*. When they reached Nice the car was stopped on the Quai des Etats Unis and Martin Crow walked through the narrow streets which lie immediately behind the promenade. At the Commissariate he

was told that M. Peille was out and would not be back for two hours. Crow said he would return, but when he presented himself again at the office at nine o'clock he was informed that the Commissaire had been detained at Draguignan where he was enquiring into the murder of a *cultivateur*, and would not be back until the following morning.

Very tired, and a little disappointed, Martin Crow returned to Roquebrune, and caused his daughter considerable annoyance by refusing to tell her what he had been doing.

"I can't understand what fun you get out of keeping things to yourself," she said, irritably.

Her father patted her hand and smiled.

"I don't get any fun out of it, my dear," he replied. "You may not have noticed it but I am, at heart, a very cautious man, and I dislike putting forward theories until I am reasonably sure of my ground. I am rather tired, so I think I will go to bed."

CHAPTER XI

MISS MAGUIRE'S WILL

GROANING and snorting like some gigantic monster, a bull-nosed engine hauled the Blue Train slowly round the bend and came to a standstill in the covered station at Monte Carlo. Not more than half a dozen people alighted, and a quick glance along the platform sufficed to tell Martin Crow which of the travellers was Miss Maguire's lawyer.

"Mr. Chart?" he asked as he approached a neatly dressed little man who wore a dark moustache and horn-rimmed glasses.

"Yes, sir, that is my name. You are, I presume, the—— I beg your pardon, but am I not addressing Mr. Martin Crow?"

Crow smiled.

"That is quite correct."

Mr. Stephen Chart shook hands.

"This is a great pleasure, I can assure you," he said. "I do not think that we ever actually met, but I have seen you many times in the courts. Dear me! I suppose I was expecting to be met by the British Consul who informed me of my late client's death. You were acquainted with Miss Maguire?"

"No, but I seem to have got myself mixed up

in the case. However, I will explain all that to you later on. Where are you staying?"

"I really don't know. Where would you advise me to go?"

"That depends upon the type of hotel that you want. There is the Paris just opposite the Casino, and the Metropole half way up the hill. Both hotels, I am told, leave nothing to be desired as regards comfort and food, but it is between two and three miles from here to Roquebrune, so you may prefer to be somewhere nearer. My daughter and I are staying over there at a small but excellent Pension, and we are within a few hundred yards of Miss Maguire's villa."

"Then why shouldn't I go there, Mr. Crow?"

"There is no reason why you shouldn't, provided you do not wish to sit upon gilded chairs and be served by white-coated waiters. I asked Mme. Ribaud, before I came out, if she had a room vacant and she showed me one next to mine."

"Then I will come there, if you have no objection."

They passed out to the station approach and in a few minutes were being driven up the hill past the Metropole on one side and the gardens on the other.

"You know, I suppose, what has taken place at the Villa Gloria?" Martin Crow asked as the car turned into the Boulevard des Moulins.

"The Consul briefly stated in his wire that my client had met with a violent death and that her

nephew had been arrested. Yesterday the morning papers were full of the affair and I obtained some details, but how far they were correct I do not know. Tell me, Mr. Crow, how you come to be connected with the case."

"Entirely by chance. On Monday last Mr. Michael Maguire arrived at the Pension Mireille, where my daughter and I are staying, accompanied by a young lady, Miss Alison Beamish, and——"

"Ah, so she is here!"

"You know her, Mr. Chart?"

"Only by name. I apologise for interrupting. Please proceed."

"We saw them during luncheon, and from their earnest conversation and anxious expressions, we gathered that they were in some trouble. At dinner that night Miss Beamish was alone. She looked very unhappy and worried. The next morning my daughter passed the time of day with her and in the evening we invited her to take her coffee with us. She was painfully restrained, but after a while I managed to draw her out and she seemed glad to have someone to talk to. Before very long she was confiding her troubles to us. She said that she was engaged to Mr. Maguire and that his aunt was trying to force him to marry his cousin, a young woman named Coral Trent, of whom you have, no doubt, heard."

"Yes, I have met her," said Mr. Chart. "I suppose Miss Maguire threatened to disinherit her nephew and cut off his allowance?"

"Yes, the matter was discussed on Monday night and she declined to accept his refusal to fall in with her plans. She told him to consider carefully the consequences and come to a definite decision the next night. The following morning, that was on Wednesday, Miss Beamish received a note from her fiancé saying that he had been arrested and charged with the murder of his aunt. Did the London papers give any details of the evidence upon which the charge was made?"

"They said very little beyond the fact that the butler had heard Miss Maguire and her nephew quarrelling violently, and had found the young man standing over her dead body. Perhaps you would be good enough to give me the essential points?"

Martin Crow briefly outlined the case.

"On the surface it appears to be pretty black for young Maguire," he continued, "but from what I have seen of him, and from certain deductions which I have made, I am convinced that he is innocent. You know him, I suppose?"

"I met him several times when he was a school-boy and used to spend his holidays at Merryfields, Miss Maguire's property in England. But I do not suppose that I should know him if I met him in the street."

"From what I have heard I gather that Miss Maguire was a woman with a forceful personality?" Crow said questioningly.

The car had left the main road and was descending

a steep hill at the bottom of which it crossed a deep ravine.

"In many ways she was a very remarkable woman," the lawyer said after a short pause. "She had very little regard for what other people thought of her and she had the courage of her own convictions."

"Hers was a hard nature, I imagine?" Crow remarked. Again there was a note of interrogation in his voice.

"Perhaps it was," replied Mr. Chart, succinctly as the car drew up at the gate of the Pension Mireille where he was introduced to Gerry and Alison, who were returning from a walk.

During luncheon the lawyer avoided making any reference to Miss Maguire's death or to the charge against Michael. He talked of the cold, wet weather which they had been experiencing in England, of the scenery along the coast between St. Raphael and Monte Carlo; and he recalled several of the famous trials in which Martin Crow had figured as leading counsel for the defence. It was nearly half past two when they all went up to the Villa Gloria where they found the Consul and M. Peille waiting for them in the library. Mr. Chart's attention was at once called to the charred paper in the fireplace and Crow explained that it was, presumably, the remains of two wills which Miss Maguire had taken from the safe when she was talking to her nephew.

"Their destruction is of no importance," said

the lawyer, "thanks to Miss Maguire's precautions which have often occasioned me a great deal of extra work. Fortunately I have here duplicates of both documents with me."

"What, an executed will?" exclaimed Crow, who, glancing across the room, noticed that Coral Trent had suddenly become interested.

"One is and one isn't," the lawyer replied as he took a long envelope from his pocket and sat down at the writing-table. "This," he went on as he took two documents from the envelope and spread them out before him, "was executed by Miss Maguire at my office in London last June. The other——"

Mr. Chart broke off suddenly for Martin Crow had gone quickly across the room on tiptoe and was opening the doors leading into the salon. He entered that room and a couple of minutes elapsed before he returned.

"I apologise, Mr. Chart," he said, as he fastened the glass doors, "but I thought I heard someone moving about in there. I happen to have an unusually sensitive ear. I have taken the precaution of locking the door which leads into the hall. I hope you will pardon the liberty, Miss Trent."

The girl did not reply, but looked nervously across the room.

"You think that the servants might be inquisitive?" asked the Consul.

"I know by experience that the best trained servants are seldom able to overcome that innate curiosity which is in us all to a very great extent."

"Did Miss Maguire have English servants with her here?" asked the lawyer.

"I understand that only the butler and her own personal maid are English," Crow explained. "The others are French or Italian."

Mr. Chart nodded.

"I was going to explain," he said, "that Miss Maguire was a remarkably keen business woman who managed her own affairs with very little assistance. She sometimes consulted me, but seldom took my advice, unless what I told her happened to agree with her own ideas; and I believe that it was the same when she had occasion to invest money. She obtained advice from her brokers and usually did something contrary to what they had said. Now, it was last summer that she wrote to me concerning the draft for a new will. She wrote from Aix-les-Bains telling me exactly how she wished to leave her property and her money, and said that she would call at my office in the course of two or three weeks, and would execute it. She said that she wished to have two copies, and that she would take one away with her."

"Was she in the habit of having things in duplicate?" asked Martin Crow.

"No, she had never made such a request before, and I naturally thought it a little strange. However, when she called to sign the will she casually remarked that she felt she would like to have a copy to which she could refer at any time. It was

quite a short document, as you see, although it disposes of capital investments amounting to something like £200,000, in addition to her property in England, this villa, and a quantity of old family jewellery. It commences by appointing myself as her sole executor and then provides for several bequests to charities. I need not trouble you with these at the moment; they only amount to some £5,000. Then she leaves Merryfields, the property near Church Mortimer, and one half of the residue, absolutely to her nephew, Michael Maguire; and this villa and the other half of the residue to her niece, Coral Trent."

"Then this is all mine?" cried Coral, half rising from her chair. Stephen Chart stared at her in blank amazement for a moment, and then said,

"Yes, in the absence of any other will which may have been executed subsequent to June 15th of last year."

"But there isn't another one, is there?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"As far as I am aware there is no other," replied the lawyer, "but your aunt had, in her possession, another will which she was going to sign under certain circumstances."

Coral had sat down again and was staring at her clasped hands. Martin Crow was explaining the terms of the will to M. Peille, who did not appear to be greatly interested. When Crow had concluded he turned to Chart.

"How much do you imagine the residue would amount to?" he asked.

"That will greatly depend upon the present value of Miss Maguire's investments, but at a rough guess, and after allowing for the death duties, I should say that the residue would be somewhere about £100,000."

"Miss Maguire was a wealthy woman," remarked the Consul. "Did she inherit the whole of the fortune from her father?"

"No, not more than about two-thirds of it," said Chart. "To my certain knowledge Miss Maguire has been saving a very considerable proportion of her annual income for the last eight years, and she has been investing all that she has saved. Although she spent a good deal of money on providing herself with a comfortable home, both here and in England, Miss Maguire could never have been justly accused of being extravagant. In this will she expresses the wish that she will be buried as inexpensively as possible, and that no one should make any outward display of mourning."

"Which means, I suppose, that she will be buried here?" the Consul questioned.

"I imagine so," replied the lawyer, who laid aside the will which he had been discussing and took up the other document. "Now this," he said, "is, of course, valueless because it is unsigned, but I think that I should reveal its conditions, because they may have some close bearing upon the murder.

I received instructions from Miss Maguire last September, just before she returned to France. A week or so later a draft was posted to this villa and after an interval of several weeks it came back with two or three pencilled corrections. In due course I sent Miss Maguire an engrossed copy and, apparently, she was quite satisfied, and told me that if, and when, she signed them she would return one to me and keep the other. Under the terms of this will Michael Maguire would have received nothing whatever unless he had consented to marry his cousin, Coral Trent. If he were married to her he would, as by the terms of the previous will, share equally the residue with his cousin; Merryfields would be his personal property, and this villa would be his wife's. In the event of his refusing to marry his cousin Miss Trent was to inherit both properties and the whole of the residue provided"—the lawyer paused and glanced across at Coral whose eyes had been fixed intently upon him while he had been speaking—"provided she was not already married to Alan Berwick, or to any other man of whom I did not entirely approve."

"But I never wanted to marry Mr. Berwick!" cried Coral, glancing furtively at Martin Crow.

"But Mr. Berwick wished to marry you, Miss Trent," said Stephen Chart.

"It's the first that I've heard of it," the girl declared, sullenly.

"Very well," said the lawyer, curtly, "I am not

here to discuss that question which has no importance unless an executed copy of this will can be found. That is not quite all, however. In the event of Miss Trent marrying Alan Berwick, or anyone of whom I did not approve, at any time, she was to forfeit the whole of her inheritance; this villa was to be sold, and Merryfields was to be endowed as a retreat for aged gentlewomen in reduced circumstances."

"Were you aware that your aunt had made that condition, Miss Trent?" Crow asked.

"Certainly not."

"Had there ever been any discussion between Miss Maguire and yourself concerning the possibility of your marrying Mr. Berwick?"

"No, never."

"Then can you suggest any reason for your aunt making such provisions, or rather contemplating making them?"

"No, I cannot."

"You did not wish to marry him?"

"I have already told Mr. Chart that I didn't."

"That, ladies and gentlemen, is all that I can tell you concerning Miss Maguire's testamentary intentions," said Stephen Chart. "Is it absolutely certain, Mr. Crow, beyond all possible doubt, that Miss Maguire did not execute this second will, and that her copies of both have been destroyed?"

"I can only tell you that Michael Maguire informed the police, and subsequently the Consul

and myself, that she told him that the second one was not signed on Tuesday night, and that M. Peille and his men have been unable to find any trace of either will apart from the charred remains which you see over there in the fireplace."

Crow translated the lawyer's question, and his own reply, to the Commissaire who nodded his head and pointed to the fireplace.

"Then for the moment we must assume that this will, which was signed at my office in June of last year, is the last will and testament of my late client," said the lawyer as he folded the two documents and returned them to their envelope.

"You did not witness the signature to the other copy?" asked Martin Crow.

"No, she informed me that she had signed it before two witnesses, but did not say when or where that took place. Now there is the question of the funeral to consider," Mr. Chart went on, addressing his remark to the Consul.

"How soon can the interment take place, M. Peille?" the latter asked the Commissaire.

"As soon as you can make the necessary arrangements, M. le Consul. The autopsy has been completed and we are satisfied that the unfortunate lady died through receiving a blow on the head from a heavy candlestick. There are no other injuries and all her organs were sound; and it is out of the question that the wound could have been self-inflicted."

While the Consul and Stephen Chart were discussing the funeral arrangements Martin Crow took the Commissaire on to the terrace.

"Have you discovered anything from the photograph of that finger-print which we found on the window?" he asked.

"We have compared it with the prints taken from everyone in the villa, the servants, the chauffeur, the gardeners, Mlle. Trent and even Mlle. Maguire herself, but it does not correspond with any of them."

"Then who made it, do you imagine?"

The Commissaire shrugged his shoulders.

"There are many *mauvais gens* who pass along this road from the frontier to Nice," he said, "and it is possible that one of those good-for-nothing fellows wandered round the villa one night and looked through the window."

"Well, perhaps you are right, M. Peille," said Crow, "but I am hoping that that finger-print will prove to be of some importance. By the way, I called at your office yesterday evening to see the photographs of the candlestick, but they told me that you were being detained in Draguignan."

"A thousand pardons, Monsieur. Yes, I was kept there until this morning. You could make it convenient to come over to-morrow?"

"At what time?"

"Shall we say eleven o'clock?" "I shall be waiting to show you the photographs, M. Crow."

They returned to the library and found Stephen

Chart talking to Coral Trent who, apparently, had asked him how she was to obtain money for the upkeep of the villa.

"I shall make all arrangements for that to-morrow, Miss Trent," the lawyer was saying. "For the present I shall be responsible for everything here."

"But how long will it be before I get my money?" persisted the girl.

"That will greatly depend upon what happens to your cousin. In any case it will not be for several months."

"Several months! But if the money is mine why shouldn't I have it at once?"

"My dear young lady," said Stephen Chart in a tone which, he hoped, would have a calming effect, "when a person dies a great many legal formalities have to be complied with before beneficiaries under a will can have their inheritances. But you need not worry. As I said just now, I shall be responsible for everything here until matters are finally settled. Now, Mr. Crow, are you waiting for me?"

CHAPTER XII

THE BUTLER

MARTIN CROW suggested that they should have tea at the Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds where they sat in the window from which there is an uninterrupted view of the whole bay and the wooded slopes of Mont Agel.

"Does the existence of another will make any difference to Michael's position?" Alison asked anxiously, in a whisper.

"No, I do not think that it will affect him either way," Crow replied, leaning across the table and lowering his voice. "But I think we will reserve any discussion until we have greater privacy, my dear. Try not to worry more than you can help. Every hour, almost, I am finding out things which, unless I am sadly mistaken, are very much in Michael's favour."

Alison smiled, and the case was not referred to again until they had had their tea and were standing outside in the road.

"I wonder if you would care to come back to the villa with me, Mr. Chart?" Crow asked the lawyer. "I should like to have a little talk with that butler, and it would be interesting to have your opinion of him afterwards."

"By all means."

"Then we shall see you two girls later," Crow remarked, and the two men retraced their steps towards the Villa Gloria.

"Do you imagine that the butler may have had something to do with the crime?" Stephen Chart asked.

"At the moment I really have very little reason for suspecting anything of the kind," Crow replied, "but I should like to have an opportunity to study him closely and asking him a few questions. Since you are arranging for the upkeep of the villa I thought you might pretend to require information concerning the wages and housekeeping costs. I don't want him to think that we have come back on purpose to pump him."

"No, that is certainly to be avoided. Perhaps I should say a few words to Miss Trent first, since she is virtually mistress there. What do you think?"

"I suppose it would be the civil thing to do, although I don't know that her attitude this afternoon called for any special consideration in return. However, it might be tactful to ask for her and explain what you want, I should prefer to question the man alone."

"I think we ought to be able to arrange that," said Chart as he rang the bell.

Boughton admitted them and showed them into the salon. After a few minutes Coral Trent came into the room and the lawyer explained that he

wished to find out how much money would be required each week.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you," replied the girl in a less sullen tone. "I never had anything to do with the housekeeping."

"Do you think that the butler would be able to tell me anything?"

"I expect he could tell you how much the wages amount to, and perhaps how the food is paid for. My aunt always saw to everything herself. But why can't you give me a weekly sum, Mr. Chart, and leave everything to me? This villa belongs to me, doesn't it?"

"I am not permitted to hand over any money to anyone until the will has been proved and various other formalities have been complied with, Miss Trent. Will you permit me to ring for the butler?"

Coral Trent sat down.

"By all means."

"I think that Mr. Crow would like to ask Boughton one or two questions concerning your cousin and would prefer to see him alone."

"You wish me to go?"

"Your presence in the room might have the effect of making him nervous and restrained, Miss Trent."

Coral got up and walked slowly through the open window on to the terrace. Boughton entered the room almost at the same moment and stood in the centre of the room while the lawyer explained

his own position and the necessity for knowing roughly how much money would be required each week. Boughton knew, to within a hundred francs, how much the household expenses amounted to.

"I suppose this means that I shall have to look for another situation, sir?" he said when he had given Stephen Chart all the information that was required.

"That is not for me to say," the lawyer replied.

"But won't the villa and Merryfields be sold up, sir?"

"At the moment I see no reason why they should be. What put that idea into your head?"

"I understood from what the French police told Miss Trent, that Miss Maguire's will has been destroyed, and I gathered that there would be some difficulties in consequence."

"A great deal will depend upon what happens to Mr. Maguire," Martin Crow said, speaking for the first time since Boughton entered the room.

"Do you think that he will get off, sir?" The butler sounded genuinely concerned.

"That is rather a difficult question to answer," said the lawyer. "What is your opinion, Mr. Crow?"

"I should not like to make any prediction," replied Martin. "It is possible, Boughton, that you might be able to throw some light upon this unfortunate business. You knew Mr. Maguire fairly well, didn't you?"

"Hardly that sir. During the two years that I

have been in his aunt's service I don't suppose I have seen him more than half a dozen times, when he came to Merryfields for occasional week-ends."

"Well, have you been able to form any opinion since . . . since the tragedy?"

"In what way, sir?"

"Do you think that he killed his aunt?"

Boughton shook his head.

"I find it very difficult to look upon him as a possible murderer, sir; and yet——" He hesitated.

"Yes, Boughton?"

"I really don't see how anyone else could have done it."

"You mean that no one could have entered the villa?"

"No, sir."

"Might not someone have entered earlier in the evening, perhaps during dinner, or even before that, and have concealed himself somewhere?"

"I think it is most unlikely, sir; besides, how could he have got away. Everything was fastened and locked."

"I think you told the police that the front door was open when you came downstairs?"

"But Mr. Maguire himself admitted opening that."

"I know," said Crow, "but let us suppose that someone had been hiding in the salon, he might have gone back there when he heard Mr. Maguire coming down the stairs, and seen him opening the front door,

and then going into the library. Now couldn't he have slipped out then?"

"No, sir. The drawing-room door was bolted on the outside," replied Boughton without a moment's hesitation.

"And the dining-room door?"

"That was bolted also, sir."

"Now tell me, Boughton, when Mr. Maguire went to Merryfields for those week-ends that you spoke of, did he appear to be on affectionate terms with his aunt?"

"I should hardly use the word affectionate, sir."

"Amicable?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when he came here last Monday?"

"They were quite friendly, sir, and I noticed nothing unusual until . . . well, sir, after dinner that night."

"What happened then?"

"They were having a serious disagreement in the library."

"Did you hear what they were saying?"

"Oh no, sir, but I heard them talking antagonistically."

"And what were they like with each other the next day?"

"Quite ordinary, sir. They all went out in the car in the morning, and I think that Mr. Michael and Miss Trent went out again in the afternoon; yes, of course they did. After dinner they played

cards again and then, as I was going up to bed I heard their voices raised in anger as I had done the previous night."

"Was Miss Trent in the library with them?"

"No, sir, she was going up to bed the same time as I was."

"I understand that you weren't feeling very well?"

"No, sir, I wasn't feeling quite myself."

"Could you hear what either of them was saying?"

"I heard him say 'I'll be damned if I do'; that was all I overheard, sir. But it was more his tone than what he actually said that attracted my attention."

"And you went straight to bed?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what did you hear next?"

"I heard Mr. Maguire bounding up the stairs and going into his room. Then, for twenty minutes or perhaps it was half an hour, everything was quiet, then I heard him banging about in his room which was just opposite mine across the landing."

"What did you think he was doing?"

"I thought he'd fairly lost his temper and was flinging his things about."

"I believe he told the police that he was packing his suit-case?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what happened after that?"

"I heard him opening his door and going downstairs."

"And you followed him?"

"Yes, sir."

"How soon?"

"After about ten minutes."

"You are sure it was as long as that?"

"Not far off ten, sir. I was in bed and I got up and put on my trousers and an overcoat."

"It took you ten minutes to do that?"

"No, sir, I didn't get up at once. I lay there for a few minutes wondering if I ought to go down and see that everything was all right."

"What made you anxious?"

"He seemed to be in such a terrible state, sir, judging by the way he came up the stairs, banged his door, and then started racketing about."

"Did it occur to you that he might do Miss Maguire any bodily harm?"

"Not actually that, sir, but I thought he might be worrying her."

"If you were feeling anxious I do not understand why you did not go down at once, instead of lying in bed."

"Well, sir, a man in my position hesitates to interfere with private affairs in the house. At first I thought that he might have gone down to fetch something that he had forgotten, but when he didn't return I decided to go and see what was happening."

"Yes, Boughton, that is a reasonable explanation. I appreciate your point of view. And what did you discover when you got downstairs?"

"I first noticed that the front door was open and that Mr. Michael's suit-case was standing beside it. Then I saw that the library door was open and I heard a movement in the room."

"Yes?"

"I went in and saw Miss Maguire slumped down in her chair with a terrible wound on the side of her head, and Mr. Michael standing over her, and one of the silver candlesticks lying on the floor a few inches from his feet."

"What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything for some moments, sir, I was too overcome. Suddenly he looked round and I noticed that there was blood on his hand and the sleeve of his coat. I think I said 'what's happened?', and he replied that someone had got in and murdered his aunt."

"What did you say to that?"

"Nothing, sir. I went across to the windows to see if they were fastened and found that they were."

"Did you come to any conclusion?"

"Well, sir, it flashed through my mind that Mr. Michael must have done it, but I hoped that there would be some other explanation. I asked him to look at the windows in the drawing-room and dining-room while I went round the servants' quarters. I had seen to the locking up before I went to bed,

but I thought that someone might have forced their way in. We both found every window and door securely fastened. I then telephoned to the police."

"You speak French, Boughton?"

"Just a few words that I've picked up during the two winters that I've been here with Miss Maguire. I just managed to make them understand that someone had been killed."

"What was your opinion at the time that you telephoned?"

"I couldn't very well help thinking that Mr. Michael must have done it, seeing that no one could have got into the villa."

"Where was Miss Trent all this time?"

"Upstairs in her room, sir."

"When did she first come upon the scenes?"

"She came downstairs while I was telephoning, sir."

"Was she very much upset?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary, sir. She seemed to be more dazed than upset, and after a few minutes wanted to go into the library, but Mr. Michael stopped her and asked me to call Miss Maguire's maid."

"When was the front door closed?"

"I shut it, sir, before I went round the servants' quarters."

"Where was Mr. Maguire when you shut it?"

Boughton hesitated for a second.

"I really couldn't say for certain. I think he had gone into the drawing-room."

"And what happened to his suit-case?"

"It was left standing in the hall, sir, where he had put it down."

"That all seems to be very clear and concise, Boughton," said Crow. "You are an admirable witness. Now, let us assume that Mr. Maguire had nothing whatever to do with his aunt's death, can you offer any suggestions as to who could have murdered her; or how anyone might have got into the villa and then made his escape?"

"I can't sir. It is a complete mystery to me if Mr. Michael didn't do it."

"Had Miss Maguire many friends in Roquebrune?"

"None who came to the villa, sir. Miss Maguire kept very much to herself, both here and in England."

"Mr. Berwick was a visitor here, of course?"

"Mr. Berwick, sir? He has never been to the villa to my knowledge until . . . he never came before Miss Maguire's death."

"Did he visit Miss Maguire at Merryfields?"

"I saw him there once or twice the year before last, and two or three times last summer when Miss Maguire and Miss Trent first returned from France."

"I thought that he and your mistress were great friends?"

"His mother owns the property adjoining Merryfields, sir, but I don't think that Miss Maguire altogether approved of the young gentleman."

"Oh. What makes you think that, Boughton?"

"Last summer, sir, she gave orders to me to say that both she and Miss Trent were not at home if he called."

"Do you know why she did not approve of him?"

"I can't say, sir. It was none of my business."

"Quite. Well, Boughton, I think that is all I want to ask you," said Crow, as he stood up. "Do you want to ask any more questions, Mr. Chart?"

"There is just one point about which I am not clear," said the lawyer. "When you went across to the library windows, Boughton, did you expect to find them closed and fastened?"

"As it was a fairly warm evening, sir, I rather expected to find one of them open, but I wasn't surprised when I found them shut. Miss Maguire liked the room to be very warm."

"Were they open when they went into the room after dinner?" asked Stephen Chart.

"Yes. I believe that Mr. Michael and Miss Trent have both said that neither of them closed the windows, so I imagine that Miss Maguire did it herself, after her nephew went out of the room."

"Was she in the habit of sitting up late?"

"Yes, sir, she used to sit up to all hours playing patience or doing jig-saw puzzles."

"I think that is all, Mr. Crow. I dare say I shall have occasion to come and see Miss Trent again to-morrow."

The two men were shown to the front door by

Boughton, who expressed the hope that his answers to their questions might be of some use in establishing Michael's Maguire's innocence.

"I think that it may be of the greatest assistance," Crow replied. As they reached the road he said to his companion: "What do you make of that fellow, Mr. Chart?"

"A typical, well-trained manservant of the old-fashioned, honest type, I should say. Is that how he strikes you?"

"Yes, I suppose that just about sums him up," Crow answered, as they turned down the road which led to the Pension Mireille, and the station beyond.

CHAPTER XIII

CHARLES CARTHEW?

"YES, let us sit in the garden, by all means," said Stephen Chart, as they finished their dinner, "and I will tell you as much of the lady's history as I know."

As they went out Gerry held her father back while Alison and the lawyer went on a little way.

"What have you discovered this evening, Father?" Gerry asked, eagerly.

"Nothing in particular, my dear."

Gerry jerked her shoulders impatiently.

"I hate you when you talk like that," she said. "I could tell directly you came down to dinner that you had made some important discovery and were pleased. You might tell me what it is."

Martin Crow smiled and shook his head.

"Directly I know anything definite I will tell you, my child," he replied as he began to follow the others. "At the moment I am in what you might call a fog of speculation, and while I am in that state it is best that I should keep my mouth shut."

"I think you are perfectly horrid," pouted his daughter in a hurt tone. Crow tweaked her ear playfully and told her not to be a spoilt child.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Crow, on your choice of your quarters," said the lawyer as they all sat down in the little harbour. "What a wonderful night for this time of year; the last week in March."

"Father is an expert at finding beauty spots," said Gerry as she offered Stephen Chart her cigarette case.

"Thank you, Miss Crow, but I'll have my pipe if no one objects. I see that there is a liner anchored off Monaco. I wonder what it is?"

"A Cunarder, by the colour of her funnels," replied Crow. "They usually make Monaco one of their ports of call when they are cruising in the Mediterranean. Dear me! Just look at those reflections! I've never seen the sea so calm. There isn't a ripple anywhere. Well, Mr. Chart, what have you to tell us about Miss Maguire. As many details as you can muster, please. Details are usually so much more important than the great big facts that shout at you."

Stephen Chart lighted his pipe.

"Miss Jennifer Maguire," he began, "must have been close upon sixty years of age. If hers was a hard, unsympathetic, domineering nature, it was by no means without its good qualities. She was a woman who took sudden and violent likes and dislikes to people.

"I told you something about Miss Maguire this morning, but I doubt if you were able to form an idea of what she was really like. I first met her

when I became my father's partner, nearly forty years ago. My father was a close friend of old Mathew Maguire, and I spent many a week-end at Merryfields, where I made the acquaintance of his daughters, Jennifer and Annie. Annie was the younger and was, in many ways, a very attractive young woman. She had many admirers, but they were all sent about their business by the father."

"Why was that?" asked Martin Crow.

"I believe it was entirely due to his domineering spirit; his love of keeping people completely under his will. Even in those days Miss Jennifer was cold and reserved; very different from her sister, who was a normal, light-hearted girl, and must have been very unhappy, shut up in that large house and under the tyrannical jurisdiction of her father. She endured it until she was twenty-seven, or eight, and then she fell deeply in love with a man named Edward Trent. As with her previous admirers, old Maguire tried to dismiss him, but Trent was of stouter stuff than the others; and Annie was more deeply in love than she had been before. There was a terrible scene when the girl refused to give up her lover, and the father turned her out of the house and said that he never wanted to see her again. She went; married Edward Trent, and together they left England for Australia where, I understand, he was at one time a prosperous sheep farmer.

"You may think that this has nothing to do with Miss Jennifer Maguire," the lawyer continued,

“but I think that it is all pertinent to the present case. Mathew Maguire dismissed his younger daughter from his mind; held no communication whatever with her, and forbade his elder daughter to correspond with her. Miss Jennifer, however, wrote secretly to her sister, once or twice a year, and received letters in reply through some friend. The old man never knew that this was going on until he was on his death-bed and relented somewhat for his harsh treatment of Annie. Miss Jennifer, I understand, then confessed that they had been corresponding and, not only was the old man eager for news of his younger daughter, but he made Jennifer promise that she would go out to Australia and visit her sister as soon as he was dead. Mathew Maguire passed away—that was about eight years ago, leaving everything to his elder daughter, who paid the promised visit to Australia and found her sister in very comfortable circumstances.

“Miss Jennifer was absent from England for about six months and when she returned she bought the Villa Gloria where she has spent every winter since that time. Two or three years after her return from Australia she heard that her brother-in-law had died and that her sister was carrying on the farm with the assistance of her husband’s head man. About eighteen months ago Miss Jennifer received a cable saying that her sister had died, leaving the daughter, Coral, practically penniless. Miss Maguire at once cabled the girl’s passage money and instructed

her to come to Marseilles, where she would be met."

"The Commissaire showed me a letter from Mrs. Trent to her sister," said Martin Crow. "She said that things had turned out very badly for them and that she did not expect to live long as she was suffering from some malignant disease. She hoped that her sister would look after the girl."

"Ah, Miss Maguire did not tell me about that letter," said Stephen Chart. "However, Coral Trent arrived early last year and Miss Maguire apparently, took a great liking to her. After leaving here in the spring they seem to have travelled about a good deal and did not arrive in England until the middle of June. That was when she called at my office and executed the will which we had prepared for her. They only remained in London for two or three days and then went to Merryfields. It was while they were there that Alan Berwick, the son of a neighbour, began paying attentions to Miss Trent. This caused Miss Maguire a great deal of annoyance, and history once more repeated itself. Alan Berwick was given a broad hint, but he did not take it; in fact he told Miss Maguire that he was not going to allow her to stand in the way of his and Coral Trent's happiness, and that if she persisted in trying to keep them apart he would take matters into his own hands. Apparently Miss Maguire's position was made more difficult by the fact that Coral Trent reciprocated the young man's affections,

and Miss Maguire began to doubt her ability to deal with the situation."

"Why did she object to the attachment?" asked Crow.

"I was coming to that," replied Stephen Chart. "Miss Maguire sent for me and told me that Alan Berwick was a most undesirable young man. The only thing that she seemed to have against him was that he made no serious attempt to work, and was content to lounge about on an income of three or four hundred a year which had been left to him by his father. I fancy that Miss Maguire imagined Berwick to be attracted, not by the girl herself, but by the money which she would some day inherit."

"I suppose she may have been right on that point?" Crow suggested.

"Very likely. I had the greatest respect for Miss Maguire's judgment. She had an uncanny way of detecting any kind of fraud. She referred to Alan Berwick as 'a waster,' but I really do not know that such an appellation was in any way justified. However, she was determined that they should not marry, and told me that she was going to make it quite impossible for such a thing to happen. She informed me that she had decided that her niece should marry Michael Maguire. Now I knew that Michael was already engaged to Miss Beamish, with his aunt's full approval, and I ventured to point this out to her, but she brushed my observation aside with a laugh

and a wave of her hand. She said that she was not going to allow Miss Beamish, or any other girl, to upset the plan which she had made. It was then that she instructed me to draft the will which has never been executed. She said that there was no urgent hurry for it as Michael was working hard for an examination which he would be taking in February, and she did not wish to upset him before it was over. As soon as he had sat for it she would ask him to spend his holiday at the Villa Gloria and would then tell him that she wished him to marry his cousin."

"What an extraordinary creature she must have been!" exclaimed Gerry.

"She was, in many ways most extraordinary," Stephen Chart agreed. "I could never understand if Michael's exam was her real reason for not trying to force the marriage at once. I am almost inclined to believe that she took a delight in keeping Coral Trent and Alan Berwick apart while marriage between them was still possible."

"Something similar to the cat and mouse game," said Gerry.

"I'm afraid it was, Miss Crow. When I pointed out to Miss Maguire that she would meet with considerable opposition from Michael she only smiled and said that since he was entirely dependent upon her she would easily overcome his objections. When I realised that she was determined I urged her to deal with the matter at once, thinking that it would be kinder to everyone concerned, rather than to

let it drag on, but she would not hear of it. She said that she intended managing her affairs in her own way and did not require advice except when she asked for it. She was leaving almost at once for Roquebrune so as to get Coral Trent away from Alan Berwick. It did not seem to occur to her that the young man might also spend the winter on the Riviera, and I did not suggest that he might do that. I took my instructions and departed, thankful, I must admit, to get away from the house. Now, I wonder if I have omitted anything which might have an important bearing upon the case."

"Can you say for a certainty that Miss Maguire had no living relatives apart from Michael and Miss Trent?" asked Crow.

"It is possible, of course, that there may be some distant cousins somewhere scattered about the world, but I have never heard of any, and I am positive that she has no near relations."

"In which case we can take it as certain that Michael Maguire is her next-of-kin; and after him, Miss Trent?"

"Undoubtedly. But may I ask why you have raised that question, Mr. Crow?"

"It was raised the other day by M. Peille, the Commissaire. I told him that it was inconceivable that Michael should have destroyed a will by which he was going to benefit to such a large extent, and M. Peille pointed out that if he were next-of-kin he would inherit everything if no will was produced."

"Rather a far-fetched theory, wasn't it?" asked the lawyer.

"Very far-fetched, I thought, but there it is, a point of view taken by the French police."

"You don't think that Michael did kill his aunt, do you, Mr. Chart?" asked Alison during a lull in the talk.

The lawyer was a little taken aback by her question.

"No, Miss Beamish, I do not, but I cannot overlook the fact that the most unlikely people have been goaded into committing crimes of which they would ordinarily be incapable. Miss Maguire was the type of woman who would, I think, be capable of exasperating a saint. However, you must not let anything that I say worry you. I know so little about the case. Your friend here, who was once one of the greatest criminal lawyers practising at the English Bar, is, I know, confident that your fiancé is innocent."

"I would stake anything I possess upon his innocence," declared Martin Crow, vehemently. "I admit that we are up against a strong case, but it is not so strong that I will not be able to break it down. Now, Mr. Chart, I have rather an important question to put to you. When I was looking through Miss Maguire's pass-book yesterday I saw that during the last twelve months she has been making quarterly payments of £125 to someone. Her bank in London has passed the money to the English

bank in Nice. Can you suggest anyone to whom she might be making an allowance."

"I can't, Mr. Crow. Have you made enquiries at the Nice bank?"

"Not yet. I thought I would talk to you first about it."

"I fear I cannot help you. It is certainly rather significant. £500 a year?"

"Yes."

"You might take the matter up with the bank; in fact it is a matter which perhaps demands my attention."

"Then you may feel disposed to come over to Nice with me in the morning?" asked Crow.

"By all means. I shall have to go over there in any case to see the Consul about the funeral arrangements. It might be wise to arm ourselves with a formal request to the bank, from him, that they supply us with all information relating to Miss Maguire's account."

"I think that would be very wise," said Crow. "I have an appointment with the Commissaire at eleven and would like to be able to tell him about anything which we may learn at the bank. Do you mind starting early?"

"At what time do the English banks open in this country?"

"Nine."

"I will be ready to start at any time you care to mention," said the lawyer.

"There is a train at half past eight. Shall we get that?"

"I shall be ready. And now, if you will excuse me, I think I will retire. I did not sleep very well in the train last night."

The next morning Martin Crow and Stephen Chart presented themselves at the English bank. The manager read the short note which the Consul had written and then left them for a few minutes. When he returned he was accompanied by a clerk who carried a ledger.

"We find that the four payments which interest you were paid into the account of Charles Carthew," the manager informed them.

"Does that name convey anything to you, Mr. Chart?" Crow asked.

"Nothing whatever," replied the lawyer. "Can you tell us anything about this client of yours?" he asked the manager.

"He opened his account on the second of January of last year. What was he like, Harding, you saw him when he came in, didn't you?"

The clerk considered the question for several seconds before he answered.

"I should say that he was a man of fifty, or possibly fifty-five," he said at length. "He has reddish hair and rather a brusque manner."

"Tall, short, or of medium height?" asked Crow.

"Medium, thick-set, and he wears a close-cropped moustache."

"When did you see him last?" enquired Chart.

"He was in the bank last Saturday when he cashed a cheque for two thousand francs."

"Had you seen him recently before that?"

"Yes, he drew a cheque for fifteen hundred about three weeks ago, on March 8th to be exact."

"Did he say where he was staying?"

"No, he gave no address."

"I suppose he gave one when he opened the account?" Stephen Chart asked. The clerk referred to the ledger.

"Yes, he was staying at the Hotel Balzac, here in Nice."

"Has he been in and out of the bank at regular intervals since that time?"

"No. Between last March and January of this year he drew cheques from time to time through our Paris office and our branches at Deauville, Le Touquet and Vichy."

"Would you please tell us how his account stands at the moment?" the lawyer asked.

"There is a credit balance of £27 10s. 4d."

"May I suggest," said Chart, addressing the manager, "that if this man should come into the bank again you inform the British Consulate and detain him on some pretext."

"Is he suspected of being concerned with this case which the Consul mentions in his letter?"

"I think that it is important that the police should have an opportunity to question him," said Martin Crow. "I am going to see the Commissaire now, and perhaps you would like me to ask him to make a formal request that you detain him."

"Yes, I think that would be a good plan, gentlemen."

Martin Crow and Stephen Chart thanked the manager and took their departure. They turned towards the Promenade des Anglais and paused at the corner where they stood for a few minutes watching the crowds of people lounging in the deck chairs on the other side of the roadway. It was a warm, summer-like morning, with a cloudless sky and a light breeze blowing gently from the south-west.

"Well, Mr. Crow, how much of that information is going to help you," asked the lawyer.

"I don't know," replied Crow, "but I fancy that it may prove to be the key to our problem. You are going back to the Consulate, aren't you? I shall pay a visit to the Hotel Balzac and see if I can learn anything there; then I shall go to see the Commissaire. Will you give me the pleasure of your company at luncheon at, say, one o'clock?"

"I shall be delighted. Where shall we meet?"

"Shall we say in the lounge of the Hotel Ruhl?"

"Where is that?"

"You are standing with your back to the entrance of the hotel at this moment," replied Martin Crow with a smile.

CHAPTER XIV

MARTIN CROW EXPERIMENTS

THE Hotel Balzac is situated in one of those pleasant little streets which lead out of the Avenue Victor Hugo. It was a small, unpretentious hotel where full pension terms were offered for the equivalent of about eight shillings a day. Martin Crow asked the concierge if Mr. Charles Carthew was in, and was told, as he expected, that no one of that name was staying there. In answer to further questions, the man in the desk referred to the register and found that Mr. Carthew had arrived at the hotel, from Paris, on March 1st, and had left again two days later, saying that he was going into Italy. No, he had left no address to which letters could be forwarded.

"I think that he was also staying here last year," Crow said. "In January." The concierge consulted the register again. "He may have arrived before that."

"Yes, Monsieur, he came from Marseilles on December 20th, and left on January 5th."

"Do you know where he went on that occasion?"

"No, sir, I was not here then, and there is no note in the book."

Martin Crow thanked the man, and made his way along the Avenue de la Victoire, where he entered

a small shop and bought a tennis ball. He then walked along to the Prefecture and asked for M. Peille. The Commissaire received him almost immediately.

"Good morning, M. Crow, you have come to see the photographs of the candlestick, no?"

"Yes, but before you show them to me I should very much like to see M. Maguire in your presence for a few minutes. You have no objection?"

"Of course not."

M. Peille rang a bell, which was answered by a clerk, who was ordered to give instructions for M. Maguire to be brought up to the Commissaire's room at once.

"I am going to ask him to do several things, M. Peille," said Crow as soon as the clerk had gone out of the room, "and I shall be obliged if you will kindly notice very carefully how he does them. This is a matter of considerable importance."

"This sounds interesting and a little mysterious, M. Crow," said the police chief with a smile. "Will you not tell me a little more of what is in your mind?"

"For the moment, with your permission, I will say no more," replied Crow. "Afterwards, when we are alone again I shall have a great deal to say."

They discussed the weather, the number of people on the Riviera, and were commenting upon the political situation in Europe when Michael entered the room followed by a gendarme. He smiled cheerfully as he saw Martin Crow.

"Have you discovered anything yet?" he asked eagerly.

"I have discovered many things since I last saw you and——"

"What? How soon are you going to get me out of this beastly hole?"

"My dear fellow, no one appreciates your feelings more than I do, and while I can assure you that I am very well satisfied with the results of my enquiries, I cannot hold out any hope that you will be liberated just yet. You have seen Maître Corbin recently?"

"He was here for an hour yesterday, but I haven't much faith in him. It is on you that I am counting, Mr. Crow."

"I am touched by your faith in me, Maguire, and I hope that you will not have cause to be disappointed in me. I do not think you will. Now, I am going to ask you to do several things which you may consider a little strange under the circumstances, but I wish you to do them without question, and as naturally as possible. First of all will you please sign your name on this piece of paper? You have a pen?"

Michael took a fountain pen from his pocket and wrote his name.

"Now write it with your left hand," said Crow, who at once translated his order into French.

"Good Lord! But I don't think I can."

"Try, my dear fellow, and do your very best, because much may depend upon how you do it."

Michael made the effort, with a result which was not very satisfactory.

"Now take this pencil and try to draw a square, first with your right and then with your left hand."

M. Peille was watching with the keenest interest, and smiled when Michael turned out a strange figure when he transferred the pencil to his left hand.

"That's pretty ghastly," the young man said.

"Never mind. Now will you go over there and stand by the door?" Crow said. "I have here a ball. I am going to throw it to you, and I want you to catch it and throw it back."

Michael looked very perplexed, but did as he was told without asking any questions.

"And now," said Crow, handing him his walking stick, "I want you to imagine that this is either a cricket bat or a golf club. Show me how you would play a stroke." This was translated for M. Peille's benefit.

Michael smiled and took up a stance as if he were about to drive a ball from a tee, and then swung the stick.

"Only one more experiment," said Crow. "Take this ball and try to pitch it with your left hand so that it falls at my feet. I will stand as far away from you as possible."

Michael threw the ball, but it shot across the room and did not land within three or four yards of Crow's feet.

"Thank you. You have helped me very much."

"But how? What's the game?" Michael asked.

"For the present I must ask you to restrain your very natural curiosity. I will tell you this, however, these little tests which I have been giving you have proved a theory and should go a long way towards establishing your innocence. How are you getting on? Is it terribly uncomfortable?"

"Not too bad. The food's a bit rough."

"M. Peille, is there any reason why M. Maguire should not have one meal sent in each day from a restaurant?" Crow asked.

The Commissaire shrugged his shoulders, and made a grimace which was intended to express his regrets.

"I am sorry, M. Crow, but it is not permitted in cases of such importance."

"The Commissaire says that it is not allowed," Crow told Michael, "but I have something of considerable importance to say to him and it is possible that I may persuade him to reconsider his decision. If he does I will see that you get a decent meal sent in each day."

"That is awfully good of you, Mr. Crow."

"You have any books?"

"No, a French paper is all that I see."

"You have no objection to his having papers and books, M. Peille?"

"But no, provided they are inspected first, of course."

"That is understood. All right, Maguire. Don't despair. I am afraid it may be three or four weeks before we get you out of this, but I am confident that it is only a matter of time. As soon as I can come along with pretty strong evidence against someone else you won't remain here much longer."

"But if you don't?"

"I have sworn to myself that I shall," replied Martin Crow, with perfect confidence, "so keep your spirits up."

"I'm frightfully grateful to you, sir. How's Alison?"

"Splendid. You need not worry about her. We are taking the greatest care of her. I will ask M. Peille if I may bring her to see you to-morrow."

The Commissaire gave his consent, and when Michael had gone out of the room he turned to Crow and said,

"Well, and may I ask why you play a game of ball with the accused?"

"You were watching?"

"But yes. All the time."

"And did you notice anything special about the way in which he did everything?"

"No, I cannot say I noticed anything special. Why?"

"He used his right hand, M. Peille, and when I asked him to do things with his left he was like a child. You could not read his name; the square which I asked him to draw looked like some queer

insect; and the ball, instead of dropping at my feet, went behind your desk."

"But I do not understand, M. Crow. That was only natural. I should have been surprised if he had used his left hand."

"Exactly, but you see, I am convinced that Mlle. Maguire was struck by a left-handed person."

The Commissaire stared at Crow and opened his mouth wide.

"But . . . but how can you possibly think that?"

Martin Crow sat down and faced M. Peille across the desk.

"I want you to consider those photographs of the body," he said, "and to take special note of the exact position of the wound."

The Commissaire opened a drawer, found the three photographs and laid them out before him.

"Voilà!" he exclaimed. Then he shook his head. "But I do not understand what is in your mind, M. Crow."

"I will explain. Your case is that Michael Maguire entered the room, half an hour or more after his quarrel with his aunt, picked up the candlestick and struck her a violent blow on the right side of the head."

"Yes, yes, that is so."

"Now, as he entered the room she was sitting with her back to him?"

"Yes."

"And he must have been facing her, across the writing-table, before he could have inflicted that wound?"

"Yes, that is reasonable. The police surgeon gave the opinion that the blow was struck from the front and not from behind."

"Now I assume that he passed round on Mlle. Maguire's left because that would have been the easiest way to go from the door. The standard lamp would have been a little in his way if he had gone to her right."

"What you say is possibly correct, but I do not think that it matters whether he went to the right or the left."

"With due deference to your opinion, M. Peille, I think that it may matter a great deal. However for the moment we will leave that point. Now, imagine him arrived at the other side of the desk and facing his aunt; according to your case he wished to kill her and decided that he would hit her over the temple, the weakest part of the skull. Now wouldn't you have expected a right-handed man to have seized the candlestick on his right?"

The point interested the Commissaire, and he considered it for a minute before replying.

"In the excitement of the moment, and with his brain deranged by the contemplation of the terrible deed he was about to commit, I think that he might have taken up either candlestick."

"I must disagree with you entirely, M. Peille,"

cried Martin Crow, excitedly. "If he was slightly unbalanced at the moment as you suggest, I submit that that was all the more reason why he would have done the easiest thing; that is he would, instinctively, have taken up the candlestick which was nearest to his right hand."

"I am sorry, M. Crow, but I cannot allow that. I repeat that I think he might have taken up either candlestick."

"Very well, M. Peille, we will leave that for the moment and suppose that he seized the left hand candlestick with his right hand. Now the blow which must, inevitably, have been struck would have been an oblique one, and I should have expected the rim of the candlestick to have made an almost vertical wound. But it did not do that. You can see it in the photograph. It is almost horizontal, which is consistent with the blow having been dealt with the left hand."

M. Peille rubbed his chin thoughtfully and gazed at the photograph.

"That is a very fine point, M. Crow," he said after a few moments.

"Upon which a young man's life, or at any rate his whole career, may depend."

There was a short silence, and then the Commissaire looked up and said,

"I admit that there is reason in what you said about the angle at which the wound lies, but I do not admit that such a wound could not have been

made by a right-handed blow. Suppose that Mlle. Maguire had suddenly turned her head to the left, at the moment when the blow was struck; that would have made all the difference to the angle of the wound."

"Possibly, M. Peille, quite possibly; but can you honestly imagine her head being turned to the left? Even if she had turned it momentarily, to look at something at the side of the table, or in one of the drawers; she must have become aware of impending danger. She would have heard a sudden and quick movement; or have seen a hand raised and grasping the candlestick; and she would have turned her head back and faced her assailant. However, the day before yesterday I consulted Dr. Aristide Journet who, you will probably agree, is a man whose opinion cannot be lightly dismissed."

"We have the greatest respect for the opinions of Dr. Journet," agreed the Commissaire. "And what did he say, M. Crow?"

Martin Crow took the doctor's report from his pocket and handed it to M. Peille.

"May I trouble you to read what he has written?" he said.

The Commissaire's eyebrows contracted as he read the report.

"Yes, yes, my dear M. Crow; I admit that your theory has reason," he said with a smile, "but as a celebrated lawyer, with many years of experience with criminal cases, you will understand that we

must accept such things with caution. Dr. Journet, you observe, is not prepared to state definitely that a left-handed blow was struck."

"No one could do that unless he had been an eye-witness."

"Well, I am prepared to bear your theory in mind, M. Crow. May I ask what, in your opinion, actually took place in that room on the night of the murder?"

"Before I trouble you, M. Peille, with any more of my theories may I see the photographs of the candlestick?"

"But yes; I was forgetting; and I was unfortunately out when you called yesterday, or was it the day before, yes, to be sure, the day before." The Commissaire had taken a large envelope from one of the drawers of his desk. "Here you are, four of them taken from different positions."

Martin Crow took the photographs eagerly and after a few seconds a look of keen disappointment came into his eyes. He had hoped that the position of the marks might have shown clearly whether a right or left hand had been used; but there was such a confusion of marks that only two stood out clearly, and they were not in the least helpful."

"Thank you," he said, as he handed back the photographs. "It is obvious that it was handled more than was necessary for striking the blow."

The Commissaire nodded and returned the envelope to his drawer.

"Now, M. Crow, perhaps you will tell me what, in your opinion, happened."

"Either the murderer concealed himself in the salon early in the evening, and entered by the glass doors separating the library from the salon, or he came through the window from the terrace."

"But the windows were fastened."

"How do you know that, M. Peille?"

"We have the testimony of both the accused and Boughton."

"Not the accused, M. le Commissaire."

"But he told us that Boughton went across to the windows and found them fastened."

"No, Monsieur; he told us that the butler said that they were fastened. That is entirely different."

"You accuse Boughton of having lied?"

"I say that we have no proof that the windows were closed and fastened when the murder was committed."

"Then why should Boughton have said that they were?"

"That is a question which I cannot answer at the moment, but I am going to make it my business to discover if he was telling the truth or lying."

"You suspect him of having murdered Mlle. Maguire?"

"Frankly I don't; but I shall be greatly surprised if I am not able to prove that he knows a great deal more about the crime than he has told us."

"You have talked to him?"

"Yes, with M. Chart yesterday afternoon."

"And you were not satisfied with his replies to your questions?"

"His replies were remarkably clear and ready, but I gained the impression that he was not telling us everything. However, we will leave him for the moment. I have a favour to ask."

"I am at your service, M. Crow."

"I want you to help me to get in touch with a man named Charles Carthew."

"Charles Carthew. Who is he?"

"That is what I want to know. If you can find him I believe that we shall very soon know who killed Mlle. Maguire."

The Commissaire paused in the act of lighting a cigarette and looked at Martin Crow over the flaming match.

"You think that he may be the murderer?" he asked.

"It is possible, but I believe that he could, at any rate, tell us something."

M. Peille swore as the match burnt his fingers. He struck another and when he had lighted the cigarette, leant forward with his elbows resting upon the desk.

"You must understand, M. Crow," he said, speaking firmly, but in a friendly tone, "that it is most unusual for us to occupy ourselves with the theories and suggestions which are put forward by the friends of accused persons. If we did that we

should never get through our work. This case, however, is a little different from most with which we have to deal. In the first place an Englishman of good family is concerned, and we are most anxious to avoid doing anything which might cause any ill-feeling between the two countries. Then your own interest in the case lends considerable weight to the theory that M. Maguire had been the unfortunate victim of circumstances."

"You honour me, M. Peille."

"I have the greatest respect for your judgment, M. Crow, and I know that you would not ask me to do anything unless you had very good reasons for doing so. On the other hand your little demonstration with the ball and the stick, and the pen and pencil has by no means convinced me that M. Maguire was not concerned with the death of his aunt. I cannot overlook the fact that he was faced with destitution unless he complied with his aunt's wishes. He had every reason for desiring her death, and if he was not responsible for it, it is a most extraordinary coincidence that it should have taken place when it did, at the very moment, almost, when it would solve all his difficulties for him. You will, I am sure, admit that we know of no one else who benefited in any way by her death."

"At the moment we do not know that, M. Peille."

"Ah, you think that you may discover someone who might have benefited?"

"That is one reason why I wish to find Charles Carthew."

"But who is he."

"Someone to whom Mlle. Maguire has been making quarterly payments of £125 during the past year."

"M. Chart can tell you nothing about him?"

"Nothing."

The Commissaire remained silent for half a minute.

"Is there any reason why there should be any connection between those payments and the crime?" he asked.

"No, but there is always the possibility that there is, and it is a point which I wish to investigate."

"He may be an old servant?" suggested the Commissaire.

"I do not think that Mlle. Maguire would have been so generous to an old servant. Moreover, I should not have expected such a person to receive the money through the English bank here, at Nice."

"Ah, it was paid to the bank here?"

Martin Crow related all that he had been told by the bank officials and by the concierge at the Hotel Balzac.

"It is interesting, yes, it is interesting, I admit," said M. Peille. "You think, then, that Charles Carthew may have visited the Villa Gloria on the night of the murder?"

"Quite possibly."

"In which case the finger-print on the window might be his?"

"That is more than likely."

"There is nothing to indicate where we might start making enquiries for him?"

"I'm afraid not. I suggest that with the assistance of your colleagues along the coast, you comb out all the small hotels and Pensions."

"It shall be done, M. Crow," said the Commissaire as Martin got up to go. "I have here the description of him."

"I thank you. And now one more question, will you permit me to bring M. Maguire's fiancée over to see him to-morrow for a few minutes?"

"By all means! If I am not here I will leave instructions that they can meet; in the presence of a gendarme, of course."

"That is understood," said Crow, as he offered the Commissaire his hand.

CHAPTER XV

AN EAVESDROPPER

THE day had been unusually warm for the time of year, and with the change to summer-time dinner was being served in the garden at the Pension Mireille. From one of the mimosa trees there came the incessant song of a *cigale*, as if in accompaniment to the chorus of the frogs giving their evening concert from the concrete water tanks on the neighbouring terraces. The cloudless sky was deepening to a rich purple and a full moon was rising over the Mediterranean, a little to the right of Cap Martin.

"Yes, my dear Alison, I saw your Michael this morning and I have arranged with M. Peille for you to see him to-morrow."

"Was he looking well, and was he fairly cheerful?"

"He was remarkably cheerful and seemed to be in the best of health," Crow answered. "I am afraid I rather mystified him by making a little experiment; but I will tell you about that later on. I want to hear first what the Commissaire said to you two girls. Where and when did you meet him?"

"As we were returning from Mentone after tea," Gerry replied. "He was coming out of the Villa Gloria, and seemed to be very worried about something. He rather surprised us by asking if we had any theories."

"And what did you tell him, my dear?"

"I said that I had none except that I was certain that Michael was innocent," replied Alison. "Gerry startled him by asking if he had taken Alan Berwick's finger-prints. He wanted to know what he had to do with the case."

Martin Crow smiled.

"I fear that the estimable M. Peille lacks imagination and vision," he said. "Of course the trouble is that he and the examining magistrate are so certain that Michael is the murderer that they are blind to all else. What did you tell him, Gerry?"

"I suggested that he should compare Alan's finger-prints with the one that I found on the library window at the villa."

Both Martin Crow and Stephen Chart looked surprised.

"Does that mean that you suspect Berwick of having committed the crime?" asked the lawyer, addressing Gerry.

"I think that he is as likely to have done it as anyone else, more likely, perhaps," she replied. "I wonder if it has occurred to anyone to find out what he was doing on Tuesday night?"

"I admit that his movements have not interested

me, so far," said Crow. "And I don't suppose for one moment that the Commissaire has thought of interrogating him."

"I think that you should question him, Father," said Gerry.

"Perhaps I should, but to tell you the truth I am far more interested in an individual named Charles Carthew, and I have been devoting my energies to making enquiries about him, and getting expert opinion on my theory that the fatal blow was struck by a left-handed man."

"You really have grounds for supposing that?" asked Stephen Chart.

"I have, unquestionably," replied Crow, "but I have not yet been able to convince M. Peille."

"What evidence have you?"

"I base my conclusions on the shape and position of the wound, and the position in which the body was found. I am positive that the murderer was standing on the other side of the writing-table, facing Miss Maguire, and that he took up the candlestick on his left with his left hand, and dealt a straight blow. Apart from the fact that I do not think a right-handed man would have stretched across to the left side of the table for the candlestick, a blow struck with the right hand would have fallen at a different angle. I——"

Their talk was interrupted by Mlle. Antoinette, who came out to say that M. Berwick wished to see M. Crow at once. They had almost finished their

meal and Crow asked the girl to bring the visitor out. A few moments later Alan, looking white and agitated, came quickly across to the arbour. He gave them each a swift glance and then said,

"Could I speak to you privately, Mr. Crow?"

Martin Crow looked round the garden which was now deserted except for themselves.

"By all means," he said, getting up. "Let us go across to those chairs at the other end of the terrace." Alan followed him. He remained standing when Crow had seated himself.

"I have come to ask your advice," he said, nervously, and glancing about him as if he feared that he might be overheard. "A couple of hours ago the Inspector, or whatever he calls himself, from the Gendarmerie along the road, came and asked to take my finger-prints."

"Well?"

"What the devil's the game?"

"Suppose you sit down, my dear fellow, and try to calm yourself," said Crow as he indicated a chair opposite to his own. Alan sat down.

"Calm myself!" he exclaimed. "That's all very well, but I'm not used to this sort of thing. Why should they want my finger-prints?"

"Having been a great friend of Miss Maguire; and having been in and out of her villa, I think that we may regard it as a matter of routine work on the part of the Commissaire," said Crow. "He of course

took the finger-prints of Miss Trent and all the servants."

"Does he imagine that he's going to find evidence that I handled that candlestick?"

"I think not. The marks found on the candlestick were, unquestionably, made by Michael Maguire, who admits that he was fingering it while he was talking to his aunt."

"I suppose it's pretty certain that he did kill her?"

"On the contrary, as far as I am concerned, it is certain that he did not."

"Who did, then?"

"Ah! That is what I should very much like to know."

"Do you suspect anyone?"

"Yes, I do."

"Who?"

"The person who left a finger-print on the outside of the library window," said Martin Crow, speaking very slowly and keeping his eyes fixed upon Alan's face. He saw the young man start. The movement was only slight and in a moment he had completely recovered his composure. "Tell me, Berwick, how much have you seen of Miss Maguire during the last month or six weeks?"

"What's that got to do with the case?"

"Look here," said Crow, speaking sharply, "you said just now that you had come to ask my advice."

"Yes, I did."

"Then let me tell you that there is one person in Roquebrune who does not consider you to be altogether above suspicion."

"What? Suspects me of having killed Miss Maguire?" Alan cried.

"My dear fellow, do please try to keep calm."

"Calm, when you are told that you are suspected of being a murderer."

"I did not say that. As far as I know no one suspects you of having killed Miss Maguire, and I, for one, do not think that you have the courage to kill anything, but you are certainly suspected of being in some way concerned with her death."

"My God! You think that?"

"To be candid, I don't; but as I have told you, I know someone who does."

"Who? The Commissaire over at Nice?"

"I shall mention no names, but I should like to warn you that if you have nothing to conceal it will probably be in your interests to answer my questions frankly. If, on the other hand, there is something which you wish to keep dark, I advise you to get up and go. I say that because I am not going to rest until I have proved that Michael Maguire did not murder his aunt; and in doing that I shall probably prove who did."

Alan Berwick remained silent. He sat with his eyes fixed upon the broad path of the moon's reflection which stretched from the shore almost to the horizon. Crow could see that his lips were quivering.

He was clasping and unclasping his hands incessantly.

"I wonder if you would like to tell me what is the exact position between Coral Trent and yourself?" Crow asked presently.

"We are friends," Alan replied without moving.

"Nothing more?"

"No."

"Then why did Miss Maguire make it a condition in her will that Coral would inherit nothing if she married you?"

Alan turned and looked at Crow defiantly.

"I am not prepared to answer for what Miss Maguire did," he replied.

"How long did you say you'd been staying here?"

"About a couple of months."

"The other day you said all the winter. Which is correct?"

"I arrived just after Christmas."

"And Miss Maguire was an old friend of yours?"

"I've known her ever since I can remember."

"Isn't it strange, then, that you never visited the Villa Gloria until she was dead?"

"What the devil d'you mean?"

"I mean, young man, that for some reason you have made up your mind to lie to me as hard as you can. Come now, what is it that you are trying to conceal?"

"I'm not trying to conceal anything."

"Then don't lie to me. I did not spend twenty years of my life at the criminal bar, cross-examining witnesses and defending criminals of all kinds without learning to discriminate between the truth and lies."

"I had my own reasons for not visiting Miss Maguire," Alan replied, sulkily.

"Wasn't it because you knew that you would not be admitted; in the same way that you were not admitted to her house in England last summer?"

"You seem to know a hell of a lot!"

"It is my job to know a hell of a lot."

There followed a minute's silence. Alan Berwick stared into the distance again.

"Miss Maguire and I had a bit of a row about something last summer," he said.

"About what?"

"Oh, a family affair."

"You mean about Coral Trent?"

"All right."

"Come, come, my dear fellow," said Crow. "You are making me think that there may really be something in the accusing suggestions which have been put forward concerning you. If your conduct has been straight why can't you confide in me? Why make me drag every word from you? Or why don't you get up and go, if you don't want to be questioned?" Alan did not move. "Why did Miss Maguire object when you began to pay attention to Miss Trent?"

"Who told you she did?"

"No one, but it is obvious that she did, and I naturally wonder what reason she had for objecting. Did she think that you were a bit wild?"

"Probably."

"You might just as well tell me instead of beating about the bush, because it is more than likely that my investigations will take me to England in the course of a day or two, and if I go there I shall certainly revisit the county of Shropshire, and make a few enquiries in the neighbourhood of Church Mortimer."

Another silence.

"Oh, well, I suppose I may as well tell you," Alan said after a while. "She got to know, at least I imagine she did, about a bit of scandal concerning myself and a village girl; and I know for a fact that she had the blasted cheek to tell my mater that I ought to be working instead of spending so much of my time at home."

"Of course it was all lies that you told me the other day about being sent to the South of France for your health?"

"I'm not particularly robust."

"Don't talk nonsense, Berwick. You came down here in the hope of being able to see something of Miss Trent. Why did you make up that stupid story about having a weak chest?"

"To tell you the absolute truth I knew at once, that morning when you and your daughter came

into the villa garden, that you were nosing round, and I didn't see why I should answer all your questions."

Martin Crow smiled.

"Had I questioned you I might have expected you to resent my curiosity, but I would remind you that both you and Miss Trent began by giving me a whole lot of information for which I did not ask, and which I have since discovered was most misleading."

"I knew jolly well that you'd start pumping us sooner or later, so I thought I'd get in first."

"With lies which were bound to be found out. Tell me, Berwick, did you succeed in meeting Miss Trent previous to her aunt's death?"

"Once or twice, for a few minutes."

"Where?"

"On one of the lower terraces, down by the railway line."

"And you asked her to marry you?"

"I suppose I'd better admit that I did."

"You will gain nothing by lying to me, my dear fellow. And did she accept your proposal of marriage?"

"More or less. She wanted to marry me, but she knew that it would mean a hell of a row with her aunt if we did. We decided to leave it for a bit, and in the meantime Coral was to try and make her aunt regard me more favourably."

"Now, Berwick, I'm going to ask you a very

important question and I want either a truthful answer or no answer at all. You can choose which it shall be. What were you doing between nine-thirty and ten-thirty last Tuesday evening?"

"Yes, I knew that was coming."

Alan's voice was scarcely audible.

"In all probability you will be asked that question by the Commissaire. Well?"

"I was in Mentone."

"Whereabouts in Mentone?"

"Walking along the front."

"Did you spend the whole evening doing that?"

"I——" Alan broke off as he saw Gerry coming towards them.

"Father, M. Peille wants to speak to you on the phone."

"Very well, my dear. Stay here and entertain Mr. Berwick until I come back," Crow said as he got up. He went across the terrace and into the Pension.

"M. Crow? Ah! I apologise if I derange you," said the Commissaire, "but I thought that you would like to know that, at your daughter's suggestion, we took the finger-prints of M. Berwick this evening and find that one of them corresponds with the print which Mademoiselle found on the library window at the Villa Gloria."

"That is most interesting, M. Peille," said Martin Crow. "I happen to have been conversing with that gentleman for the last twenty minutes in the

garden. May I venture to ask what you make of your discovery?"

"For the moment I make nothing. I think that he may be able to explain the presence of his fingerprint on the window. Having been a visitor at the Villa he——"

"That is where you are supposing too much, M. Peille," said Crow. "He was not a visitor there until after the tragedy."

"But——?"

"I know. I have been discussing it with him. He was not approved of by Mlle. Maguire."

"Mon Dieu! But this becomes interesting. I shall ask him to call at my office in the morning and I shall put a few questions to him. I shall want an account of his movements last Tuesday evening."

"As a matter of fact I have just been asking him what he was doing then."

"And his answer was satisfactory?"

"Quite satisfactory if he was telling the truth."

"He has left you?"

"No, he is still in the garden, talking to my daughter."

"Ah, your daughter! She is sharp. She seems to suspect that young man. Do you agree with her in that respect, M. Crow?"

"At the moment I am not prepared to answer that question, M. Peille. "In half an hour's time I might be able to do so."

"Perhaps you will let me know to-morrow what you decide?"

"I will come and see you some time during the day."

Martin Crow returned to the garden and found Gerry and Alan looking over the garden hedge beyond which the ground sloped precipitously down to the station.

"We have been trying to hit that Agave tree with these pebbles," Gerry announced as her father joined them.

"And who won?" asked Crow.

"Neither of us succeeded in hitting it at all," Gerry confessed. "Are you going on talking now or are you coming over to us, Father?" she asked.

"We will come in a few minutes, my dear. There is something that I wish to ask Mr. Berwick." Crow waited until Gerry had joined Alison and Stephen Chart in the arbour, then he turned to Alan. "I have just been talking to the Commissaire on the telephone," he said, "and he tells me that your finger-print corresponds with one which was found on the library window at the Villa Gloria."

"Oh my God!"

For several minutes neither of them spoke. Alan Berwick dropped into a chair and sat gazing at his hands which were tightly clasped between his knees. Crow watched him for some while and then said,

"Well? Is there any explanation that you'd like to give me. The Commissaire will be sending for

you to-morrow. I think perhaps you will find it easier to talk to me than to him."

A couple of minutes passed before Alan Berwick sat upright and looked straight at Crow.

"All right, I'll tell you, and I'm sorry I didn't do so before you got that message about the fingerprint. I don't suppose you'll believe a damned thing that I say now; but that can't be helped. All the same, I swear that what I'm going to tell you is true. You were quite right, Mr. Crow. I came down here to see Coral and discuss the possibilities of marrying. She was ready enough, but I haven't the means to keep a wife, at least not in any sort of style, and I knew jolly well that it would be just madness to run off with her and get nothing out of the aunt."

"To be perfectly frank, Berwick, you wanted to marry Coral Trent provided she could bring you a comfortable income, and not otherwise?"

"I wasn't going to marry her if it meant keeping her on my present income. Now, when I came down here first, I knew that it would only be asking for trouble if I showed myself to Miss Maguire, so we hit upon the plan of meeting occasionally on the lower terrace. On Sunday night Coral told me that Michael Maguire was coming the next day and that he was going to be told that he was to marry her. The next night, instead of waiting about for Coral down by the railway line I went up to the villa and peered in through the library window."

"Why did you do that?"

"Coral had said that her aunt would be tackling Michael about the marriage, and I wanted to hear what they were saying. I thought I might hear something that would help my own case. The window was open and they were fairly going for each other, and I heard Miss Maguire say that he must think it over and come to a final decision by the following evening. So I turned up again at the same time on Tuesday. I had meant to get there a bit earlier, but a fellow kept me talking at the place where I'm staying. It must have been about half past ten when I looked through the open window and got the shock of my life. I saw Miss Maguire leaning back in her chair with a ghastly wound on the side of her head. Michael was standing at her side and the butler was just coming in at the door. "I heard him say 'My God, what's happened?', and then he came across to the window where I was standing. Of course I cleared off as fast as I could."

"What did you imagine had happened?"

"Why, that Maguire had killed his aunt, of course."

"You volunteered no information to the police?"

"No, I thought it best to keep quiet."

"Did you see anyone in the garden as you came up to the villa?"

"No. I met a man on the path which runs parallel with the railway line."

"What sort of man?"

"I couldn't see. It was pretty dark."

"Which way was he going?"

"In the direction from which I had come. Towards the station."

"Did you imagine that he had come out of the villa garden?"

"I didn't think anything about him at the time."

"But afterwards, when you knew what had happened?"

"No, I didn't give him another thought until just now."

"You said the window was open, on Tuesday night, when you were looking into the room?"

"Yes."

"Are you absolutely certain about that?"

"Of course I am. I don't suppose I should have heard what the butler said if it had been closed."

"Do you know how much it was open?"

"Not more than a couple of inches."

"Were the curtains drawn?"

"Yes, but not right across. There was just a small space through which I could see. Miss Maguire, Michael and the door, where the butler was standing, were almost dead in line. I swear that's the truth, every damned word of it. D'you believe it?"

"Something that you have just said certainly confirms one of my theories pretty neatly," replied Crow, thoughtfully.

"But can you make the Commissaire believe it?" Alan seemed to take it for granted that his story was believed by Crow.

"I cannot answer for what he may think. It is quite likely that he will send for you in the morning and will ask you if you are right or left-handed. If he does I advise you to answer truthfully."

"What are you getting at?" Alan had become suddenly apprehensive.

"When I saw him this morning I told him that, in my opinion, Miss Maguire was struck down by a left-handed man."

"My God!"

For several seconds Alan sat with his face covered by his hands, then he sprang to his feet.

"I believe you've been setting that blasted Commissaire on to me, just because you want to get Maguire free, you old devil!" he cried. "How the hell did you know that I was left-handed." His tone was threatening.

"I saw you just now trying to hit that Agave with a pebble."

"God! So that's why your daughter made herself so damned pleasant while you were telephoning, and suggested trying to hit the blasted thing. It was a plot! Yes, a dirty, mean plot to catch me. What a cursed fool I was to think that you might help me, you snivelling old spy. To hell with you!"

The three people sitting in the arbour heard the last remark and saw Alan Berwick rush across the garden and go out by the side gate.

"What's been happening?" Gerry asked as her father joined them. Martin Crow sat down.

"Our young friend was rather upset when he realised that you had laid a little trap in order to discover which hand he used habitually."

"Yes, I suspected it, and was determined to make sure. Now, perhaps, you can persuade M. Peille to arrest him and set Michael free."

"Arrest him on a charge of murdering Miss Maguire?"

"Of course."

"I'm afraid you are being rather precipitate, my dear," Crow replied. "I admit that your suspicions about him may be considerably strengthened, but he is not the only person who demands our close attention."

"Yes, I know, Father, you can't help thinking that Boughton had a hand in it, but what could he have possibly gained by——"

Once more their conversation was interrupted; by Mlle. Antoinette, who came into the garden from the path leading up from the station.

"Bon soir, messieurs, bon soir, mademoiselles," she said as she approached. After an exchange of a few commonplace remarks about the warm evening, the moon and the starlit sky, the French girl went up to Martin Crow and, lowering her voice to a whisper, said,

"As I came up from posting a letter down there I saw someone crouching down against the wall. I think he must have been trying to hear what you were talking about."

Crow got up.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," he said, speaking French. "I will go upstairs and see if I can find it for you." Then he whispered in Gerry's ear, "Talk about our visitor and Peille. I shall be back in a few minutes."

Gerry started to talk about Alan Berwick's visit, and of her meeting with the Commissaire that evening. Presently they heard scurrying footsteps on the path below, and a few moments later Martin Crow entered the garden by the same gate which Mlle. Antoinette had come in by a short while previously.

"Did you see anyone, Mr. Crow?" Alison asked, eagerly.

"Yes, as Mademoiselle told us, a man."

"Who was it?" Gerry asked.

"I went through the house, out by the top gate and down the upper path. I saw him quite distinctly as I turned the corner, but he bolted directly he spotted me. Unless I was very much mistaken it was our friend, Boughton."

CHAPTER XVI

DANGER FOR MARTIN CROW

MARTIN CROW was in a taciturn mood after his discovery of the butler from the Villa Gloria on the path outside the Pension garden and would answer none of the questions which were so eagerly asked.

"If I appear to be unsociable and uncommunicative I must crave your indulgence," he said with his genial smile. "I think that I shall take a little stroll alone if you will all excuse me. No doubt you will have gone to bed by the time that I return, so I will say good night."

Gerry watched her father as he walked across the garden with his hands clasped behind his back, and his head lowered.

"He thinks that he has made an important discovery," she said, as soon as he had disappeared. "I know that silent mood of his so well."

"Do you think that he is going up to the villa to tackle the butler?" Stephen Chart asked.

"Possibly, but it is more likely that he is going for a walk. He always does that when he wants to concentrate upon some point. I think that Alan Berwick has given him a good deal to think about."

Martin Crow paused when he reached the road by the electrician's shop and looked at his old-fashioned watch. It was half past nine. Where should he go first? To the little Bar-Restaurant next to the English tea-rooms, or to Mme. Imbert's, down by the station? At which would he be most likely to learn something about Miss Maguire's butler? After a few moments he decided to visit the former first, and ten minutes later he entered the bar and asked for a glass of *vin du pays*.

Three or four working men were standing round the counter discussing a *Boule* match which their club was playing on the following Sunday. They were talking Italian, or rather a mixture of Italian, Monegasque and French, and Crow had some difficulty in understanding them. For some while he listened in silence and then, after making one or two casual observations on the game, asked them all to drink with him.

The invitation was readily accepted, and before very long Crow succeeded in steering the conversation to the *affaire* of the Villa Gloria. Yes, indeed, it was a sad business, they all agreed. Mlle. Maguire had always kept very much to herself, but she had been a wealthy woman and had patronised the local shops and had employed the people of the *quartier*: in fact one of the men worked for her in the garden and was now wondering what would happen to his job.

Martin Crow talked round the subject and tried

to avoid asking direct questions. The gardener, owing to his position at the villa, was regarded by his friends as a person of considerable importance; an authority on the crime, and he greatly assisted Crow by replying readily, and at considerable length, to any question which was put to him. No, he had never set eyes on the accused, but had heard through the cook that the young man had obviously killed his aunt in order that he might become possessed of her money and property. It was said that the defunct woman's fortune amounted to nearly three million francs. Well, that was a great temptation. Yes, the servants were all terribly upset by the tragedy, particularly the butler, who had been in the service of Mademoiselle for several years. Of course that was why he had not been seen in the bar since the crime had been committed. Poor fellow; he was too upset to come out and talk to people. No, he talked very little French, but he could make himself understood and was, indeed, an agreeable acquaintance.

It did not seem to Martin Crow that the Bar du Soleil would help him very much more, and after standing the company another round of drinks he bade them all good night and descended the hill which passes the Pension Mireille and goes on to the station. He crossed the Place Marius Otto and went down the path to the Bar Imbert which was deserted except for Mme. Imbert who sat at one of the small tables writing a letter. Crow asked for a

Cinzano *à l'eau*, seated himself at another table, and made some obvious remark about the slackness of the winter season on the Riviera. Mme. Imbert, a plump, good-looking woman, shrugged her broad shoulders and sighed.

"It is always the same now since the exchanges have been so bad," she declared, plaintively. "The Americans and the English no longer come to the Côte d'Azur as they used to. They cannot afford it. It is most unfortunate for those who depend upon the winter visitors."

"It affects you, Madame?" Crow asked.

The woman shrugged again.

"Not so much as some," she admitted. "My clients are chiefly people of the *quartier*, but owing to the *crise* they naturally have less money to spend, so it certainly makes a difference. You are not English, Monsieur?"

"Do I appear to be English, Madame?"

She smiled and looked at Crow critically.

"I think you do, and yet from your speech you must be French," she said.

"My mother was English," Crow told her truthfully. "I have many English friends, that is why I am so interested in the terrible crime at the Villa Gloria."

Mme. Imbert rolled her eyes heavenwards and made a gesture with her plump hands which was intended to express her horror.

"It is indeed terrible, as you say, Monsieur

Mademoiselle was rich and employed many of the local people."

"What is the latest news of the case, Madame?"

"I have heard nothing to-day except what one can read in the *Éclaireur*. I was expecting Mademoiselle's butler to come in, but he has not been for several days."

"He comes here often, Madame?" Crow asked, trying to subdue his increasing interest.

"I cannot say that he comes often, but he was here with a friend several times last week."

"It would certainly be instructive to hear his views on the *affaire*. What sort of a man is he? English?"

"Yes, and I should say that he was a proficient maître d'hôtel. But I have not said more than a few words to him. He did not understand much French, and was always a good deal occupied with talking to his friend."

"He was also English, I suppose?"

"They always spoke English together. The crime interests Monsieur?"

"Such things always interest me, Madame. I am an author and write *les romans policiers*."

"Ah, you write! Of course, you make a study of character."

"Exactly. And what do you think really happened, Madame? Do you think, with the police, that the nephew killed his aunt?"

"How can one tell, Monsieur? I understand that the young man was found standing over the dead

woman with a blood-stained candle-stick in his hand, and his clothes smothered with blood. And I have heard it said that his pockets were crammed with money which he had stolen from Mademoiselle's safe."

"Is that so?" asked Crow, ingenuously. "The evidence appears to be conclusive."

"Of course he will not have to pay the penalty with his life."

"You think not?"

"But no. He will employ a clever *avocat* who will show that the aunt goaded him into killing her. Our laws are reasonable and humane, Monsieur."

"And you have not seen the butler since it happened?"

"No, he has not been here since . . . now when was it? Yes, it was on Monday night that his friend came in at half past nine and ordered an omelette and a bottle of wine, and at ten, or a little after, he was joined by the butler. They were sitting at that table where you are now and did not depart until nearly midnight."

"They had much to talk about," suggested Crow.

"Yes, they were much occupied about something, but of course I could not understand what they were saying. I heard them mention the villa several times, and before they left the butler came across to the counter and asked me if I could let him see a timetable for the trains. You do not think, Monsieur, that they had anything to do with the crime?" asked Mme. Imbert with a look of horror.

"I am a stranger here, Madame, and know nothing of the case," Crow answered. "From what you tell me it seems that the police have plenty of evidence against the nephew; so why should these fellows have been concerned."

"I just wondered."

"What was the butler's friend like?"

"A man of fifty, or perhaps fifty-five. He had reddish hair and was well-dressed."

"And his manner, Madame?" asked Crow, not caring if he appeared to be eager for information.

"That is not easy to say, Monsieur, for he scarcely spoke to me, except to order his dinner and his drink."

"You could not judge by his conversation with his friend, the butler?"

"But no, Monsieur. I understand no English. They both seemed to be greatly concerned about something, and I remarked that it was the butler who did most of the talking. The other appeared to be worried. It is possible that he was being persuaded to do something. When they were consulting the time-table I heard them mention Marseille; and there was another name which I did not understand. What do you say for La Corse, in English?"

"Corsica."

"Yes, that was it. I heard that name several times."

"You think that the friend was going there, Madame?"

"How can I say. I heard the name, but I could not understand what they were talking about."

"Well, well, it is a sad business for the young man, especially if there is any reason for the suggestion that his aunt irritated him, and made him in such a fury that he did not know what he was doing."

"Indeed it is very sad," agreed Mme. Imbert, shaking her head, mournfully. "Monsieur will excuse me a little moment?"

She got up and went across to the counter to serve a working man who had slouched into the bar and demanded a *vin rouge*. Martin Crow drained his glass and, as soon as the newcomer had been served, paid for his drink and departed. He walked down the hill and, crossing over the railway bridge, walked as far as the entrance to the Case del Mare where he stood for some while, leaning over the wall and staring across the bay towards the Cap.

If anyone could have seen him it might have been noticed that a faint smile played round the corners of his mouth. He was well satisfied with his evening's work, for he had obtained a quantity of corroborative evidence which was likely to be of the greatest importance. At last he had several facts upon which he could work and which, he hoped, would impress M. Peille.

After a quarter of an hour's meditation Martin Crow turned away from his contemplation of the Mediterranean and began to ascend the hill. He had reached the Place Marius Otto and was about to enter the Pension garden when something whistled

past his ear and struck one of the pepper trees at his side. Being human, and valuing his life, he did not turn in the direction from which the shot had, supposedly, been fired—as most detectives in fiction are supposed to do—but bent down and hurried down the drive. A second shot was aimed at him before he reached the shelter of the porch unharmed.

In the hall of the Pension Crow encountered Mme. Ribaud.

“Ah, it is M. Crow. You have news from the Villa Gloria?” she asked.

“I regret to say that I have none,” he replied, still a little out of breath from his run down the drive.

“The young man is still at Nice, Monsieur?”

“Yes, and I am afraid that he may be there for some while.”

“But you will surely prove his innocence?”

“Of that I have no doubt, Madame, but it must, of necessity take time.”

“I believe, Monsieur——”

Mme. Ribaud got no further for at that moment the front door opened and Alison entered, followed by Gerry and Stephen Chart.

“Was that you who walked up the hill in front of us?” Alison asked.

“I expect it was, my dear, I have only just come in. Why?”

“We whistled to you,” Gerry explained, “but you wouldn’t have anything to do with us. We didn’t see why we should be chivied off to bed like

a lot of naughty children, so we went for a walk down to the further *plage*. What have you been doing?"

Martin Crow took his daughter's arm and smiled.

"I have been talking to some of the local inhabitants," he told her. "Did you see anyone while you were out?"

"We saw Alan Berwick scuttling across the *Place* as we came up the hill. Didn't he pass you?"

"Alan Berwick?" Crow repeated in a questioning tone. "No, I didn't see him."

"He must have been just by the gate as you came in."

"Well, I suppose I was too much occupied with my thoughts to notice anyone," Crow said. "Good night, Alison, my dear. I have learnt quite a lot to-day, you will be glad to know, and I feel that we have made headway. I really think that it will not be very long before I shall be able to persuade M. Peille to liberate your Michael, at least on parole, if not unconditionally."

"You really think so, Mr. Crow? How soon?"

"I cannot possibly tell you how soon. I am contemplating paying a visit to London, leaving here to-morrow. I shall probably be away five or six days, but I sincerely hope that when I return I shall be in a position to demand Michael's release."

"Five or six days!" exclaimed Alison, almost in tears. "Do you mean to say that there is no chance of his getting out before then?"

Martin Crow went up to her and patted her hand in his old-fashioned, fatherly manner.

"It must seem a terribly long time to you, my dear," he said, "and you must be prepared for it being even longer than that. I shall be seeing M. Peille early in the morning and I will try to arrange for you and Gerry to go over each day, or every other day, to see Michael. You are going to-morrow in any case."

"I'm sorry if I seem to be very stupid, but minutes seem like hours, and hours like days."

"I know. I can sympathise with you. However, you may rest well assured that I shall not stay away one moment longer than is necessary, and all the time I shall be working for his release."

"Perhaps you would give me a call at my office and let me know how you are progressing, or ring me up?" suggested Stephen Chart.

"Of course I will. When do you expect to be back in London?" Crow asked.

"The funeral is on Monday morning and I shall try to get away in the afternoon."

"Then you may see me on Wednesday. And now I think it is time for bed." When they were upstairs Martin Crow called Gerry into his room. "Sit down, my dear," he said. "I have a good deal to say to you. This case has some very remarkable aspects. You and I have been working on different lines, and if we laid our views on the table, so to speak, I think it is probable that there might not be much to choose between them when the weight of evidence was carefully considered."

"You mean that my case is against Alan Berwick and yours against the butler?" asked Gerry.

"Precisely. Now, the two cases stand, briefly, as follows. Alan and Coral wanted to marry and were opposed by Miss Maguire; therefore they both had a reason for desiring her death. Whether the fellow has any real affection for Miss Trent, or is merely after the money which she will inherit, I cannot say; and it does not materially affect us. On his own admission he was in the villa garden at about the time when the murder was committed; and being left-handed my theory of a left-handed blow is supported, if we regard him as the possible murderer. His lies about being ordered to the South of France for his health might be taken negatively, or as evidence against him. There remain two outstanding questions: Why should he have destroyed the wills; and who planted the five *mille* notes in Michael Maguire's suit-case? If we suspect Alan I think that we must also suspect Coral, at least of being an accessory."

"But why?"

"I do not feel that he would have committed such a crime on his own initiative, if at all. But he might have been coerced into doing it. However, the points about the wills and the notes are really of minor consideration. The wills might have been destroyed in order to create confusion; and as we agreed before about the notes, Coral may have intended hiding them somewhere in Michael's room."

"That sounds straightforward enough," Gerry admitted.

"Now let us consider Boughton," Crow went on. "In my opinion our evidence is really stronger against him than against Alan, although I admit that for the present we are without a motive. But let us forget that for a moment and consider the evidence which we have against him. He declared that the library windows were closed and fastened when he looked at them immediately after the murder, and Alan Berwick says that one was open. Now, either might have been lying, but it was in Alan's interest to say that it was closed and fastened. Then there was a little incident which was scarcely noticed at the time, just before Mr. Chart announced the terms of the will. I was convinced that someone was listening in the next room; and our experience this evening with the eavesdropper whom Mlle. Antoinette and I both saw, confirms my suspicion that it was Boughton whom I heard in the salon that afternoon. Again, when I was coming in at the gate just now someone fired a shot at me from a silenced gun and——"

"Father! Why didn't you tell me that before?"

Martin Crow smiled.

"It was certainly a little disconcerting at the moment, but I am hoping that the rather foolish attempt on my life may prove helpful to us. The bullet struck one of the pepper trees and I am

hoping to extract it in the morning. It may be most useful evidence to M. Peille."

"You think it was Boughton who fired the shot?"

"You, of course, suspect Alan Berwick."

"He must have been just there when you entered."

"Well, you may be right. It ought not to be difficult for M. Peille to find out if either of them possesses a gun which fired that bullet. That brings me to another point. I am not altogether happy about leaving you two girls, but I shall take the precaution of demanding protection from the police. They will watch both Boughton and Berwick during my absence, and I shall ask the Commissaire to put someone on to guard you and Alison. I did not say anything about my little adventure before Alison because I did not wish to alarm her."

"And why are you going to London to-morrow, Father?"

"To see what I can discover about the past history of Boughton. I start with the useful knowledge that he and Charles Carthew are acquainted."

"How did you learn that?" Crow told his daughter about his conversation with Mme. Imbert. "Father, I believe you may be right about the butler after all. Do you think now that Boughton, Carthew and Alan may have all been in it?"

"I don't know, my dear. Perhaps they were. Now I will say good night. I want to be up early in the morning."

CHAPTER XVII

SURPRISES FOR M. PEILLE

“**B**ON jour, M. Crow, I trust that you find yourself well this morning,” said the Commissaire, warmly, as his visitor was shown into the room. “I do not think you have met M. Robin, the Examining Magistrate, who is investigating the Villa Gloria case.”

Martin Crow shook hands with both men and seated himself in a chair which the Commissaire had drawn up for him.

“I am glad to say that I find myself very well, M. Peille, thanks to the uncertain aim of a would-be assassin.”

“But what is this you say?” exclaimed the Commissaire. “You do not mean to tell us that someone has made an attempt against your life.”

“That is exactly what I do mean,” replied Crow as he held out his left hand, revealing a small, round object lying in the palm. “And if you can find the gun from which that bullet was fired you will be very near to finding Mlle. Maguire’s murderer.”

The Commissaire and the Examining Magistrate exchanged perplexed glances. The former took the bullet from Crow’s hand and scrutinised it closely.

"But this is incredible," he said. "When did this happen?"

"Last night."

"Where?"

"At the gate of the Pension Mireille on the Place Marius Otto." Crow described exactly what had taken place.

"You do not know who fired the shot?"

"I have my suspicions, M. Peille, but before I tell you anything more about that I shall be grateful if you would be so kind as to do something for me, something which is rather urgent."

The Commissaire was not feeling at all happy about his case against Michael Maguire. He was beginning to realise that there was more in it than he had at first imagined, and he had no wish to run the risk of continuing along the wrong path if Crow could set him right.

"I and my colleagues are entirely at your service," he said, avoiding the disapproving look from the Examining Magistrate who greatly resented Crow's interference in what he considered to be a perfectly obvious and straightforward case. M. Robin was a weedy, shabby little man, with an unhealthy, yellow skin, and teeth and fingers which were deeply stained with nicotine.

"I am leaving for London to-day by the Blue Train," Crow explained, "and I should like to take with me a photograph of Ernest Boughton's fingerprints, also his passport."

"Ah, you suspect that fellow of being concerned with the murder of Mlle. Maguire?" demanded the Magistrate, challengingly.

Martin Crow smiled complacently at the little man.

"I wish to discover all I can of that man's history," he replied. "You have his passport here, M. Peille?"

"No, but I will ring up the Brigadier and ask him to demand it," replied the Commissaire as he took up the telephone receiver.

"One moment, please, M. Peille," said Crow. "I consider it to be of the greatest importance that Boughton should not be given further cause for thinking that he is suspected, and——"

"He thinks that already?"

"I believe so—I will explain all that later—may I suggest, therefore, that the Brigadier goes to the Villa Gloria and asks Mlle. Trent to hand him the papers of everyone there."

"Yes, yes, he can do that," agreed the Commissaire.

"And may I further suggest, M. Peille, that both Boughton and Alan Berwick are kept under close observation, and that you take steps to ensure the safety of my daughter, Mlle. Beamish and M. Chart?"

"Mon Dieu! You think that they are in danger?"

"I think that it is most necessary that you should take every precaution, M. Peille. If someone had been a better marksman you would possibly have

been investigating my assassination this morning. You do not want to run the risk of another attempt upon someone else?"

"But no. I realise that this is serious," replied the Commissaire. He gave a number and during the next few minutes carried on a rapid conversation with the Brigadier at Roquebrune. "The papers of Boughton will be delivered here by midday," he said when he had finished, "and men are being detailed to protect the two ladies and M. Chart; and others will watch Boughton and Berwick. But now, M. Crow, we are anxious to hear all your news. Please tell us exactly what is in your mind. Whom do you suspect?"

"There are two people, M. Peille, who might have wished to put me quietly out of the way. One is Boughton whom I had caught, an hour previous to the shooting incident, trying to overhear our conversation in the Pension garden; and the other is Alan Berwick who, I discovered last night, is left-handed."

"Ah yes, M. Berwick! Of course, he was visiting you when we conversed on the telephone. You asked him to explain why his finger-print had been found on the library window?"

Crow related briefly all that Alan Berwick had said when he had been questioned. "You notice something of special significance there," he concluded.

"You mean that according to him the library window was open, and according to the butler it was closed?"

"Exactly."

"Have you any reason for believing him more than you believe Boughton?" asked the Magistrate as he began to roll a cigarette.

"Yes, I have," Crow replied. "It would have been in Berwick's interest if he had said that the window was closed."

"Then why should Boughton have said it was closed and fastened if it was, in fact, open?" asked the Commissaire.

"I assume that he had some good reason for wishing to make it appear that no one could have entered the room from the terrace, and that he closed the window when he went across the room a few seconds after he had entered."

"Tell me, frankly, M. Crow, is it in your mind that that man committed the murder?"

"No, M. Peille, it is not. As I have already told you, I am convinced that the blow was struck by a man who used his left hand—a straight, perfectly judged blow which fell in exactly the right spot—and I have good reason for supposing that Boughton is right-handed and does things clumsily with his left."

"You think it possible that the actual blow was struck by Berwick, and that he was assisted by Boughton?" asked M. Peille.

"That is a view which my daughter is inclined to take," Crow replied, "and at the moment I am not prepared to offer an opinion on that point."

Berwick is, without question, left-handed, but I do not think that he would have the nerve to take a hook from the gullet of a struggling fish."

The Examining Magistrate coughed, as if to call attention to the fact that he was present.

"I think, M. le Commissaire," he said, "that our friend here is confusing this simple case by introducing his far-fetched theory about the left-handed blow. Personally I do not think that anyone could possibly decide that point, either way. The report of Dr. Journet, which you showed me this morning, practically confirms my view."

M. Peille drummed his fingers on the edge of his desk.

"I must admit that I agree with you on that point, M. Robin," he said after a short pause, "but we must not forget that M. Crow has brought to light several facts which cannot be ignored; therefore, in spite of my own opinion, and yours, I do not feel disposed to dismiss, altogether, his left-handed blow theory. It may be right. You do not think that it was Berwick who fired the shot at you, M. Crow?"

"Frankly I do not, although my daughter saw him near the Pension gate a few seconds after the shot was fired."

"And yet you are inclined to think that it was the butler?"

"Yes."

"You must have some good reason for suspecting

him," said the Examining Magistrate, whose lighted cigarette was adding to the rich bronze colour of his first and second fingers.

"Yes, M. Robin, I have very good reasons indeed," Crow replied, sharply. "Everything that I hear about Ernest Boughton increases my suspicions against him. Last night I visited two of the Café-Bars in the *quartier* and at one of them learnt that he had been there two or three times last week, and as recently as last Monday night, in the company of an Englishman whose description suggests to me that he was the individual whom I asked the Commissaire to trace, Charles Carthew."

"But this is interesting, M. Crow!" exclaimed M. Peille.

"You have heard nothing from your enquiries about Carthew?"

"Nothing, M. Crow. In so short a time it has hardly been possible to visit all the small hotels and pensions where he may have been staying."

"Now you will understand why I am anxious to know more about the butler."

"But yes, you have reason, M. Crow. I comprehend the line you are taking."

"Then while I am in England, M. Peille, perhaps you will continue your efforts to trace that man Carthew. He and Boughton were, apparently, greatly concerned about something when they were talking together in the Bar Imbert on Monday night. Before they left Boughton asked Madame for

a railway time-table which must have been required for Charles Carthew, and I am hoping that enquiries made at the railway stations along the coast may result in your discovering his whereabouts. It is more than likely that he took the last train that night to Marseilles, and from there crossed over to Corsica."

"Corsica!" exclaimed the Commissaire. "But why should he have gone there?"

"I cannot tell you, but the island was mentioned several times in the hearing of Mme. Imbert."

"Well, it is just possible that he may be able to tell us something, M. Crow, and, in deference to your wishes, I will see what can be done. We will start by making enquiries at the railway stations in this region and then we will ask the police at Marseilles and Ventimiglia to assist us."

Martin Crow stood up.

"Thank you, M. Peille," he said. "Then I shall return at midday for the papers and the photographs. May I remind you that Mlle. Beamish will be coming to see M. Maguire this afternoon?"

"Yes, yes, of course. I have not forgotten. Until midday, then."

CHAPTER XVIII

MARTIN CROW MAKES DISCOVERIES

WITHIN an hour of his arrival in London Martin Crow was being shown into the comfortably furnished room of his old friend, Sir Edward Berring, the Assistant Commissioner at Scotland Yard.

"What, back from the sunny south already?" exclaimed Sir Edward as they shook hands. He was a tall, straight man, with a short grey moustache, keen, blue eyes, and a light-hearted manner. He wore a monocle.

"For a few days only," replied Crow, as he dropped into an easy chair and stretched out his long legs towards the blazing fire. It was a cold, boisterous day, and heavy sleet was driving across the Embankment, almost entirely obliterating the view of the river. "I want your assistance, my dear fellow."

"A case?" Martin Crow nodded. "I thought you were taking a month's holiday by Gerry's orders, and under her supervision?"

Crow chuckled.

"I thought so, too, but we tumbled right on top of a murder which simply defied us to stand by and do nothing, so my holiday came to an abrupt end,

as you can well imagine. I dare say you have seen something about it in the papers; the 'affaire of the Villa Gloria'?"

"Yes, I was reading about it last night: an elderly English woman done to death by a nephew, or something of the sort, wasn't it?"

"Let us say—'supposed by the French police to have been murdered by the nephew'—and then you've got it," said Crow.

"From which I can conclude that you are working for the young man?" Crow nodded again. "Well, Martin, how can we help you here?"

Crow outlined the case, and then took a large envelope from his pocket.

"I want you to look through your files and see if you can place these," he said, handing the photographs of Boughton's finger-prints to his friend. "I must tell you that I have no reason for supposing that the fellow's been through your hands, but there's the chance that he has, and if you have a record of him it may go a very long way towards helping me to secure the speedy release of the accused."

"Whose are these?" asked the Assistant Commissioner, as he looked at the photographs.

"The butler's at the Villa Gloria. A man named Ernest Boughton."

Sir Edward touched a bell on his desk and after a few moments it was answered by a girl.

"I want you to take these at once to Chief-Inspector Epping," he said, handing her the envelope.

"Please ask him to search the files and let me have a report as soon as possible."

"Very good, Sir Edward."

The girl went noiselessly from the room.

"I suppose you are in a hurry for the information?" Sir Edward asked as he lighted a cigarette and leant back in his swivel chair.

"As far as I, personally, am concerned, there is no immediate hurry," Crow replied, "but I should like to get young Maguire free as soon as possible. I don't imagine that it is particularly pleasant being shut up in a prison cell at Nice. It's beginning to get warm down there."

"Perpetual sunshine, I suppose," said Sir Edward as he glanced towards the window.

"More or less."

"You're a lucky devil, Martin. I'd give anything to be able to drop down to the Riviera for two or three weeks. We've had nothing but rain and sleet for the last month, and it's been damnably cold."

Martin Crow smiled.

"And it wouldn't trouble me at all if I knew that I wasn't going back," he said. "It's all very delightful in its way; flowers, sunshine, and meals cooked with imagination, but there's a good deal to be said for the comforts of one's own home, whatever the weather may be outside. And as you know, I'm never happier than when I'm working hard."

"You'd better come and try my job, if you want hard work."

"Get along with you, you old fraud," laughed Crow, "I believe you've got one of the softest jobs in London. Are they keeping you on the run?"

"There's always someone ready to worry us. At the moment we are chiefly concerned with a couple of front page murders, and a gang of International jewel thieves who are making a damned nuisance of themselves. I——"

The telephone on Sir Edward's desk buzzed and as he began to converse with someone Crow stood up.

"When are you likely to have any news for me?" the latter asked as the Assistant Commissioner put down the receiver.

"I think if you come along sometime in the morning we ought to have something for you. When are you returning to Roquebrune?"

"As soon as I have learnt all there is to know about this man Boughton, and made a few enquiries about another fellow in the Midlands."

"How about dining with us one evening?"

"There is nothing that I'd like better, my dear Edward, but I'd sooner not tie myself just at the moment. I might be anywhere in the British Isles at this hour to-morrow."

"Let us leave it open and you can ring me up if you see a free evening ahead of you," said Sir Edward as they parted at the door.

When Martin Crow reached the street he turned up his coat collar and thrust his hands into his pockets

—he never carried an umbrella—and walked across Parliament Square to the Passport Office where he showed Boughton's passport to an official, with whom he had had previous dealings, and asked if he might be supplied with all particulars relating to its issue. He told the man that he would call again the next day, and then faced the wind and the sleet once more. Outside the Abbey he hailed a taxi and drove to his home in King's Bench Walk.

Crow and his daughter lived on the top floor of a house at the lower end of the row, and the floor below was given up to their offices which they occupied with Miss Lane, Crow's secretary, and two girl typists. One of the rooms on this floor was known as "the library" and, besides containing many bound volumes dealing with crime, it housed a record, in the form of carefully indexed newspaper reports, of all the principal trials which had taken place during the last twenty-five years. Many of these reports had been cut from Continental papers and related to crimes committed in almost every part of the world. Crow was very proud of his collection.

"Mr. Lomax is waiting to see you, Mr. Crow," said Miss Lane as her employer entered the office. She was an efficient, prim little person who had a deep affection for Crow and had already given him a warm welcome when he had first arrived from the train a couple of hours previously.

"It doesn't take you long to do a job, my dear," Crow remarked, as he passed into his own room.

Miss Lane did not permit herself to show her appreciation of his compliment.

"He did not happen to be far away," she replied.

"At the Boar's Head, I suppose?"

"Yes. Will you see him at once?"

"Please."

Crow went across the room and stood looking out of the window until he heard a voice behind him.

"Afternoon, Mr. Crow," said a seedy, cross-eyed little man who was running his hand nervously over his close-cropped head. "Miss Lane seems to think you may have a job for me."

"Quite right, Lomax, I have. Sit down and light up if you want to. Can you get away for two or three days?"

"For as long as you like, Mr. Crow," replied Henry Lomax as he sat down and began to fill his pipe from a battered old tin. "Things are a bit slack just now."

"I'm sorry to hear that for your sake," said Crow, "and yet it happens to suit me very well just at the moment. I want you to go to Church Mortimer and see what you can learn about a young man named Alan Berwick. You will probably find that his mother is a person of some little importance in the district, and himself a young man of some notoriety. I suggest that you nose round the village and pick up scraps of information from the villagers.

Try the local pub. Here's a fiver for you. I would like you to get off to-night. As soon as you get hold of anything go to some neighbouring village and, without making mention of any names, except your own, report to Miss Lane over the telephone. Perhaps you had better ring her up to-morrow night in any case. She may have some instructions for you."

"I understand, Mr. Crow. Do you want me to work on the Q-T?"

"I don't much care how you work so long as you learn something about Alan Berwick. You can ask Miss Lane to look up the trains for you as you go out."

"Thank you, sir. Trust me. I'll find out anything there is to be found out."

"I believe you will, Lomax. Well, good luck."

The seedy little man went out of the room and Martin Crow took up a pencil and began to make sketches on his blotter. It was Miss Lane's only complaint against her employer that he ruined every fresh sheet of blotting paper by drawing little men and women, cats and dogs, horses and birds all over them, both in pencil and ink. It was his usual practice to do this when he was concentrating upon some problem.

Yes, old Lomax would certainly not miss much, Crow reflected. He was a keen fellow who had fallen upon evil times. Once he had been a solicitor's trusted head clerk, and would have been one to-day if an unfortunate lapse had not landed him in jail for five years. Now he eked out a precarious living

by doing such jobs as Crow had just given him. Many an unfortunate respondent and co-respondent in the Divorce Court had to thank Henry Lomax for the position in which he found himself.

Martin Crow had thrown down his pencil and was staring abstractedly at his drawings when there came a knock at the door and Miss Lane entered.

"I have just received this report from Smithers," she said looking at her shorthand note-book. "Alan Berwick was born in 1907, was educated at Winchester and Oxford, read with Hugh Maters, was called in '32, but does not appear to have made any attempt to practise."

"Hm, much as I thought," murmured Crow. "Any indication of where he lives?"

"He doesn't seem to have any permanent address apart from his mother's place near Church Stretton."

"Also as I expected. Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. No doubt Lomax will discover something more interesting. I told him to ring you up directly he has anything to report."

"Very well, Mr. Crow."

The next morning Londoners revelled in bright sunshine and Martin Crow enjoyed a walk along the Embankment to Scotland Yard. The Assistant Commissioner was engaged and Crow was compelled to wait for half an hour before he was asked to go along to Sir Edward's room.

"You've come just at the right moment, my dear Martin," said Sir Edward who sat at his desk with a typewritten report before him. "Sit down and . . . oh no, I always forget that you don't smoke. Well, I've just received this screed from Chief-Inspector Epping and it seems that your man, Boughton, is fairly well known here. His real name appears to be Ernest Rayner. He was born in London in 1885, and first came under our notice in 1910 when he got five years for fraud. He served in France during the war and made his next appearance in our records in '27. For three years he had been running a Bucket Shop of the most disreputable kind with his brother, Charles, who disappeared a week or two before warrants were issued for their arrest. Ernest was put in the dock and got seven years. He gained his full remission marks and has not troubled us again. That seems to be all that we know about him."

"Enough," said Crow, with satisfaction. "I seem to have a faint recollection of the case which, if I remember correctly, lasted for several days. You have no idea of what happened to the brother."

"None. It is assumed that he got out of the country and has remained out. I suppose you will be counting on his being your other man, Charles . . . ?"

"Carthew. That is certainly what I am hoping, although I have nothing more to go on but the name," Crow replied. "I take it that he is liable to be arrested at any time if he shows up in England?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Can you give me the date when the trial commenced?"

Sir Edward referred to the report.

"May 15th, 1927."

"Dear me, that is all vastly interesting, and I am very much obliged to you, my dear Edward," said Crow as he got up. "I think I'll get back and hunt up my *Times* reports. It is sure to be amongst them."

"Yes, you should get plenty of useful details from them," said the Assistant Commissioner. "And don't forget that if there is anything more you want to know we are at your disposal. Don't be afraid to ask."

"I think it is more than likely that I may want to worry you again before very long," Crow said, as he took up his broad brimmed hat and squashed it down on the top of his great head. "What a thing it is to be well in with the mighty ones."

Sir Edward smiled.

"I might return the compliment, my dear Martin," he said. "I don't mind admitting that you have saved our faces on more than one occasion. What a thing it is to have a friendly ghost with brains at one's shoulder."

"Rot, Edward. Rot! My brains are no brighter than any others," replied Crow in his modest way. "I frankly admit that I'm a lucky devil. Most of my successes are due to a generous slice of luck."

"A lot depends upon knowing where to look for the slice," replied the Assistant Commissioner, as they parted.

Miss Lane produced the *Times* reports on the trial of Ernest Rayner. As Crow thought, it had occupied several days at the Old Bailey and the prisoner had conducted his own defence. He had, apparently, taken up an aggrieved attitude which had at once created an adverse impression upon both the judge and the jury. The two brothers, Ernest and Charles, had been trading under the name of E. & C. Lancing & Co., and had occupied offices in Gray's Inn Road. From there they had circularised a large number of people of small means and had tempted them to part with their money by promising quick and handsome profits, and absolute security of capital. They had commenced their operations by confining them to American Railways and similar fluctuating securities; but as the business expanded they were tempted to advise their clients to invest their money in companies which did not exist. No proper account had been kept and it was difficult to estimate the extent of the fraud, but the prosecution declared that the Rayners, who had been poor men when they were demobilised, had, for some time, each been living at the rate of £1,000 or £1,500 a year. Ernest had a house at Maidenhead and Charles occupied a flat in South Kensington.

When he went into the witness-box Ernest Rayner

took full responsibility for the conduct of the business, and said that his brother had been little more than a sleeping partner, visiting the offices once or twice a week. Under pressure, however, Ernest admitted that Charles's attendances might sometimes have amounted to three or four during a week. It was obvious that he was trying to shield his brother. Every effort was made to discover the whereabouts of Charles, but counsel for the prosecution could get nothing out of Ernest, on that point, beyond a declaration that his brother had suddenly disappeared and that he had not heard from him since.

When he had finished reading the reports Martin Crow, entirely forgetful of the time, put on his hat and walked along to the passport office, where he was told that Ernest Boughton's passport appeared to be in order; that it had been applied for through one of the leading travel agencies; and that a Dr Mason, of Church Mortimer, had vouched for the identity of the applicant.

As he regained the street Crow stood for some minutes watching the passing traffic and wondering what he should do next. It was long past his usual luncheon hour, but he did not think of that. He was a little disappointed, having vaguely hoped that he would have been told that the passport had been forged. Such a discovery would, undoubtedly, have impressed M. Peille and have induced him, perhaps, to liberate Michael Maguire. Well, he could not have it all his own way. The name of the doctor at Church

Mortimer was worth having. He would have to make a journey to Shropshire, but he also wanted to pay a visit to Maidenhead. Which demanded his attention first? After a while he decided that he would go to Maidenhead without delay, and, hailing a taxi, he drove to Paddington where he found that he would have to wait half an hour for a train. Becoming conscious of an empty feeling he filled in the time by visiting the refreshment room, where he ate a couple of ham sandwiches and drank a glass of milk.

CHAPTER XIX

MARTIN CROW VISITS MAIDENHEAD

AN hour later Martin Crow was making enquiries at Maidenhead for Ditton Lodge and was directed to a medium-sized house standing in a pleasant garden on the Windsor Road. A postman who happened to be passing was questioned.

"Can you tell me if any of the people in these houses were living here in 1926?" Crow asked the man who lifted his hat and scratched his head, meditatively.

"Living here in 1926," he repeated, dully. "That's a goodish time ago."

"Eight years, to be exact. Was that before your time here?"

"Lord bless you no. I've been doing this round for the last eighteen years. Now, just let me think."

The postman scratched his head again and then rubbed his chin.

"Yes," he said at length. "Unless I'm very much mistaken, Mr. and Mrs. Potts was here then; in fact they was one of the first to come here when those houses was built."

"Where do they live?"

"The Laurels, just opposite. She breeds Pekes."

"Breeds what?" asked Crow.

"Pekes. You know, them small dogs with curly tails and faces what look as if they've been stood on."

"I understand. Did you by any chance know Mr. Rayner who used to live at Ditton Lodge?"

"What, the bloke what got run in for fraud? Lord, yes, I knew him and a nice gentleman he always seemed to be. Always gave me a bigger Christmas box than anyone else. But you can never tell, can you?"

"No, I suppose not," Crow agreed. "Thank you, I am much obliged," and he slipped a shilling into the man's hand.

The Laurels was a similar house to Ditton Lodge and the two gardens were separated by a high laurel hedge. Martin Crow walked up the drive and rang the bell. Immediately there was an excited chorus of yelping dogs, and when the door was opened half a dozen of them swarmed round his legs.

"Good afternoon," he said to the plump, smiling little man who wore a shabby plus-four suit and gazed enquiringly at the visitor. "Are you Mr. Potts?"

"Yes. Good afternoon." Crow imagined that he was probably taken for a prospective Peke buyer.

"I must apologise for troubling you but I was informed that you had been living here for a good many years, and I am anxious to learn all I can about a man named Ernest Rayner who——"

"What, old Ernie Rayner, of Ditton Lodge? Well I'll be blowed. Fancy anyone wanting to know anything about him now. I thought he was forgotten and done with long ago. Come inside Mr.—?"

"My name is Crow."

"Come in, Mr. Crow, and we'll see what we can tell you," said Mr. Potts as he held the door open.

Martin Crow entered a stuffy, heavily-furnished hall and was shown into the dining-room. The six pekinese scrambled in front of him and at once took possession of all the comfortable chairs.

"Sit down, Mr. Crow, and make yourself at home. What can I offer you to drink?"

"Nothing, thank you; I have only just had my lunch."

"But you must have something. I'm going to have a whisky and soda myself. Or would you sooner have a glass of sherry?"

Martin Crow had no desire to drink anything, but he knew Mr. Pott's type; matey and loquacious when humoured.

"A very small glass of sherry, then, if you please."

"Ah, that's better," said the host as he went across to the sideboard and began to pour out the drinks. "Why, bless you, we was reel pally with old Ernie Rayner during the two years that he had Ditton Lodge; and never a suspicion did we have that anything was wrong until we heard that he'd been arrested. He always made out to us that he was a member of the Stock Exchange, and we never

had any reason for disbelieving him." Mr. Potts came back to the table in the centre of the room and handed Crow his glass of sherry. "Cheerio! Now what is it that you want to know about him?"

Crow raised his glass, sipped his wine and then leant back in the very uncomfortable arm chair which he had been compelled to take because the dogs were occupying all the others.

"I am investigating a case in which the same Ernest Rayner is probably concerned and——"

"Are you a detective?"

"No, I am not," Crow replied. "I am an ordinary private individual who happens to have become connected with this case in which your former neighbour may have taken a part; and it occurred to me that you might be in a position to tell me something about him."

"You bet I can tell you plenty," exclaimed Mr. Potts with relish. He was going to experience all those old thrills again. How well he remembered being questioned by people while the trial was taking place; being asked if he had ever suspected Rayner of being a swindler; and whether he had been persuaded to part with any of his money. Neither he nor Mrs. Potts ever admitted to anyone that they had never seen a single penny of £200 which they had once handed to Ernest Rayner.

"I should like to tell you that the result of my enquiries may mean life or death to a young man who

is now charged with a crime which, I am confident, he never committed."

Mr. Potts put down his glass and let out a long whistle.

"Murder?" he asked, eagerly.

"That is the charge," replied Crow, feeling certain that Potts would be unlikely to make any attempt to warn Ernest Boughton, even if it were in his power to do so.

"And you think that Rayner did it?"

"I am of the opinion that he could give me information which would exonerate the young man whom I have mentioned. I do not think that he actually committed the crime, but it is quite likely that he was an accessory."

"Well I'm jiggered! Live and learn; that's what I'm always telling my wife. But of course, when a fellow makes one side-slip he usually goes from bad to worse, sooner or later. As I told you just now, we never suspected a thing. He always seemed to be such a decent sort; hospitable, liberal with his money, and nice mannered. He used to subscribe to all the local charities. Ha! Damned queer! I suppose the blighter could afford to be generous with other people's money."

"For how long did you know him, Mr. Potts?"

"Why, we had him next door for about two years. Many's the time that he's had a meal with us in this very room; and we was in and out of his place,

dining and playing Bridge, all the time, as you might say. Have you met him?"

"I believe I have."

"Then you'll probably understand how people might be taken in by his pleasant manners. On the surface he appeared to be the reel gentleman; civil and the acme of hospitality itself. Not that he ever splashed his money about ostentatiously, but he knew how to do things well; gave you a damned good dinner, and knew how to choose his wine. Never gave you a drop of second rate stuff. Everything of the best, always."

"What sort of an establishment did he keep up?"

"A cook-housekeeper and a couple of maids. Nothing showy, you know, but everything done just so."

"Did you ever meet any of his relatives or friends?"

"Friends, yes, people from round about we was meeting all the time, of course; and then there was his brother, a red-haired chap who used to come down for week-ends sometimes; and there was his sister who was staying with him when he was run in."

"You met both brother and sister?"

"Oh yes; he always made a point of asking us in when he had anyone staying with him."

"Now what can you tell me about the brother, Mr. Potts?"

"Not a great deal, I'm afraid. He wasn't unlike

Ernie, except for his red hair. He was the younger of the two by three or fours years, I should say. Quite a nice chap in his way, but a bit quiet and reserved. It was Ernie who had the brain, of course."

"Had the brother any peculiarities that you noticed?"

"None that I can call to mind. He was quite a normal sort of fellow; not anything like so matey as Ernie."

"And the sister, what was she like?"

"A nice little woman in a quiet way. Not so stylish as the two men, you know. A bit dowdy, in fact; straight-laced and rather churchy. My wife and she hit it off pretty well together, used to go shopping and to the pictures."

"What was her name?"

"Lancing, Annie Lancing. She was a widow."

"Do you happen to know where she lived?"

"Ah, now you've done me, Mr. Crow. I couldn't say; in fact I doubt if I ever knew, but I dare say my wife could tell you. If you don't mind waiting half a jiffy I'll go and ask her."

Mr. Potts slid off the corner of the table upon which he had been sitting and went out of the room. Martin Crow heard him talking to someone upstairs and then, after a short interval the door opened and the little man entered followed by a tall, thin woman who was nervously smoothing out the front of her frock which she had obviously put on in a great hurry.

"This is my wife," said Potts, in his breezy manner. "Now, Millie, you tell Mr. Crow what you know about that Mrs. Lancing."

Mrs. Potts sat down on the edge of an occasional chair and blinked her faded eyes.

"A nice little woman I thought she was, Mr. Crow; and I'm sure that she never knew what those two brothers of hers were up to. We both felt terribly sorry for her when it all came out, didn't we, Leslie?"

"You bet we did."

"Do you happen to know where she lived, Mrs. Potts?"

"Well, when we knew her first she had a little house at Hampstead, but when she came and stayed with her brother just before his arrest, she told me that she'd gone to live at Bournemouth. I can't remember now what the address was because it's so long since I wrote to her, but I know it was somewhere quite close to the cemetery. She said her husband was buried there and she wanted to be handy so that she could look after his grave."

"Have you seen her since her brother's trial?"

"No, nor have I heard from her. After it was all over I wrote to tell her how sorry we was, and that if there was anything we could do for her she was to be sure to let us know, but she never replied. Poor thing. I dare say she felt so ashamed that she wanted to cut herself off from everyone who had been connected with that swindling brother

of hers. So he's been up to something worse than fraud, Leslie tells me?"

"I would not commit myself so far as to say that he has been up to anything," Crow replied, "but he happens to be connected with a very serious case which I am investigating."

"Well, if you happen to see him you can tell him from me that we are a bit more careful nowadays who we make friends with," said Mrs. Potts.

Crow dismissed the request with a smile.

"I wonder if either of you ever heard him mention the name Maguire?" he asked.

"Maguire, Maguire," repeated Mr. Potts. "I never heard it; did you, Millie?"

"Not that I can remember."

"It happens to be rather an important point and I should be obliged if you would make an effort to recollect."

"Maguire, Maguire," Mr. Potts muttered half aloud as he wandered round the room. "Name seems to be a bit familiar to me and yet I can't place it in connection with either of the Rayners, or Mrs. Lancing."

"No, no more can I," said his wife, shaking her head regretfully.

"Then I do not think that I need trouble you any further," said Crow, getting up. "I am very much obliged to you both for what you have told me."

"Don't mention it, my dear fellow," said Potts with a hearty laugh which seemed to be rather out

of place. "Only too glad to be of any assistance to you. And if there's anything else we can tell you don't be afraid to come and ask."

"I shall not fail to take advantage of your kind offer," replied Crow, taking up his hat. "And now I will wish you good day."

"Here, have another drink before you go?"

"Thank you, I will have nothing more."

"Won't you have a cup of tea, Mr. Crow," asked Mrs. Potts. "It's half past four and I expect it's all ready."

"If you will not think me ungracious I will get back to town. I have a great deal to do. Another day, perhaps, if I should find it necessary to worry you again."

"Then just give us a ring to say you're coming," said Potts as he gripped his visitor's hand. "Maidenhead 01986, and make it lunch. We shall be glad to have another little talk about old Ernie Rayner."

CHAPTER XX

MRS. LANCING

MARTIN CROW was more than satisfied with his day's work, and as he travelled up to Paddington he occupied his time by mentally arranging all the information which he had collected since his arrival in London the previous day. He took it for granted that Charles Rayner and Charles Carthew were the same person and that, with his brother, he had lived by his wits until events made it expedient for him to reside out of England. Somehow he had become acquainted with Miss Maguire, and for some reason she had been induced to make him an allowance of £500 a year. Now why had she done that? Had this man some legitimate claim upon her; or had he been blackmailing her? Martin Crow was inclined to accept the former supposition. Regular quarterly payments of £125 by a wealthy woman did not savour of blackmail. Then how had this man's brother, Ernest, come into Miss Maguire's service? Had that happened by chance or by design? By design, surely, Crow argued to himself. He had entered her service a year or more before the quarterly payments had commenced; but that did not indicate anything definite.

It was at once obvious to Martin Crow that he would have to pay a visit to Bournemouth and try to get into touch with the sister, Mrs. Lancing, whose name the two men had used for their Bucket Shop business. She would have to be dealt with most tactfully, and perhaps it would be advisable to see her before journeying to Church Mortimer to see the doctor who had sponsored Ernest Boughton when his passport was applied for.

When Crow reached his home he found that Miss Lane had just been talking to Henry Lomax on the phone. The latter had reported that Alan Berwick was the shining light amongst those who foregathered each evening in the saloon bar of the Mortimer Arms. He had not been seen in the village for several weeks, but had spent the whole of last summer, and the autumn at his mother's house. He was described as a "rare good sport who was always good for three or four rounds of drinks any evening of the week." Six months ago the local magistrates had made an affiliation order against him, and this had caused a considerable stir amongst the gentry of the district, but had not affected his popularity in the bar of the Mortimer Arms. Henry Lomax did not think that there was much more to be found out about the young man, and a wire was dispatched ordering him to return to London the next day.

That evening, as Martin Crow was eating his simple meal, the post brought him a letter from

Gerry. She said that M. Peille had paid them several visits and was much agitated because Alan Berwick had disappeared. He had left the Pension des Bambous early on the morning following his visit to the Pension Mireille. The police had satisfied themselves that he had travelled by a train to Ventimiglia, but after that they had lost all trace of him. Coral Trent had been questioned, but could not, or would not, give any information which might lead to the discovery of Alan's whereabouts. Both Boughton and Coral were now being closely watched, and it seemed to be the Commissaire's opinion that both of them and Alan and Michael had been concerned with Miss Maguire's death.

Martin Crow put the letter down and went on with his meal. That Michael Maguire was completely innocent he was certain, but Alan puzzled him. He still held to his conviction that the latter was too "weak-kneed" to commit murder, but he realised that he might have played a minor part under the direction of Boughton. The news of Alan's disappearance was certainly interesting, and might prove significant later on, but for the present he did not consider that it seriously affected the situation.

The next morning Crow took an early train to Bournemouth where he at once drove to the cemetery and then began to make enquiries at the shops in the neighbourhood for Mrs. Annie Lancing. At the third shop which he visited, a greengrocer's, he

learnt that Mrs. Lancing lived at No. 204 Belvedere Road but to his disappointment he found the house shut up. He called at the houses on either side and although the occupants were, in each case, acquainted with Mrs. Lancing they could not say where she was to be found. She had gone away about a week ago. It was suggested, however, that a Mrs. Frant, who lived at No. 203, opposite, and was a great friend of Mrs. Lancing, might be able to say where she was.

Martin Crow knocked at the door of No. 203 and was told that Mrs. Frant was out and would not be returning until tea-time. He said that he would call again, and, making his way down to the town, walked through the gardens and went on to the Pier. At four o'clock he returned to Belvedere Road and found that Mrs. Frant had just come in. She was an elderly, white-haired woman who eyed Crow suspiciously.

"What can I do for you?" she demanded, curtly.

"I am a lawyer," Crow replied, "and I am anxious to find Mrs. Annie Lancing as soon as possible."

"You do not bring her bad news, I hope?" asked Mrs. Frant, anxiously.

"I wish to obtain some important information from her."

"I am glad. I was afraid——" Mrs. Frant paused abruptly and gave her visitor a faint smile. "It does not matter. I am expecting Mrs. Lancing

to return to-morrow morning. She has been taking a week's holiday at Weymouth."

"Weymouth! That is not very far from here. Perhaps I could see her there this evening if I motored over."

"Is it as urgent as all that?"

Crow considered the question for a moment. While he wished to return to Roquebrune as soon as possible there was really no desperate hurry. Perhaps it would be more satisfactory to wait and interview Mrs. Lancing in her own home.

"No, I suppose it isn't," he said. "When do you think I could see her to-morrow?"

Mrs. Frant went across to a writing bureau and after a few moments returned with a post card.

"I received this from her last night," she said. "She will be arriving at the West Station at eleven. Perhaps if you called at about half past two that would be the most convenient time."

"Thank you. I will do as you suggest," Crow said, and took his leave.

Crow had taken the precaution to bring a small suitcase which he had left at the station. As soon as he had collected it from the cloak-room he walked on to the East Cliff and took a room at one of the small hotels which stand in pine-shaded gardens and overlook the bay. The following afternoon he paid a third visit to Belvedere Road and was admitted to Mrs. Lancing's house by a neatly-dressed maid. He was shown into a comfortably

furnished sitting-room and after a few minutes a faded little woman entered, and hesitated when she saw him, as if his great size frightened her a little.

"I must apologise for intruding upon you, Mrs. Lancing," Crow said in his gentlest tone. "I am a lawyer and have reason to believe that you can assist me."

Mrs. Lancing advanced and sat down with her hands clasped in her lap. It was patent to Martin Crow that she was apprehensive about something. She appeared to be too nervous to speak. He felt deeply sorry for her and wished that he need not trouble her.

"I understand that you have two brothers, Mrs. Lancing?"

The little woman stiffened slightly and met Crow's eyes bravely, but with obvious fear.

"Yes, I have two brothers, that is if they are still alive," she answered in a low voice.

"You have seen neither of them lately?"

"I have not heard of either of them for several years." She answered in a voice which she could scarcely control. "Has anything happened to either of them?"

"That is a question which I am unable to answer. Please understand, Mrs. Lancing, that only the greatest necessity would have induced me to come to you like this. I am investigating a case which may be the ruin of an innocent young man. Under

those circumstances I think you will appreciate my difficult position."

"I thought you said you were a lawyer?"

"That is my calling, Madam."

"You spoke as if you were a police officer."

"I am sorry."

"How did you find me here?"

"Yesterday I was making certain enquiries at Maidenhead and a Mrs. Potts told me that she made your acquaintance some years ago."

"Mrs. Potts. Yes, I knew her a long time ago." A pause during which Mrs. Lancing allowed her eyes to wander round the walls which were hung with Marcus Stone reproductions. "It is foolish of me to shrink from it. Tell me what brings you here, Mr. Crow. Of course one of them is in trouble again?"

"I cannot answer that question with any certainty. Have you ever heard of anyone named Boughton?"

"Boughton. That was my mother's maiden name. Why do you ask?"

"Because that is the name by which your brother, Ernest, is now known. You did not know that he had taken that name?"

"No."

"May I ask when you saw him last?"

Mrs. Lancing looked down at the carpet and her lips moved as if she were making a calculation.

"It must have been about three years ago, in December."

"That would have been at about the time of his . . . release?"

"Yes," almost in a whisper.

"He came to see you?"

"He wrote to me first, through my bank, and asked if he might come."

"And you said he might?"

"Yes."

"I suppose he wanted help?"

"He hadn't a penny."

"Did he tell you what he proposed doing?"

Mrs. Lancing hesitated. Crow imagined that she was trying to decide how much she should tell him. At last she sighed, as if she felt that nothing really mattered.

"I think he said that he might join his brother in Australia."

"Australia! Your brother Charles went there?"

Mrs. Lancing lowered her eyes quickly and began to pull distractedly at a small lace handkerchief which lay in her lap. Martin Crow watched her in silence. He had anticipated and dreaded such a scene as this. His kind hearted nature revolted against having to do anything which might cause pain, and yet he so often found himself compelled to do so. But there was too much at stake for him to consider the feelings of this poor woman.

After a few moments Mrs. Lancing looked up; their eyes met and in his she saw determination. She gave a short involuntary cry, and burying her

face in her hands allowed herself to weep untrainedly. Martin Crow did not say anything, but got up and walked over to the window. Presently Mrs. Lancing checked her tears.

"Please forgive me," she said, brokenly. "I went through so much at the time and it seems as if I may have to endure it all over again. Even though they are my own flesh and blood I cannot try to defend their past conduct. Ernest got all he deserved and Charlie . . ." she paused and made a slight gesture . . . "for all I know he may be dead. I have not seen him since before that terrible time."

"You have my sympathy, Mrs. Lancing," said Crow as he returned to his chair. "I have very good reason for supposing that your brother, Charles is still alive. Did you say that he went to Australia?"

"I shouldn't have told you that."

"Did your brother, Ernest, tell you to keep Charles's whereabouts a secret?" Mrs. Lancing nodded her head. "Do you imagine that he went there in the spring of 1927?"

"Yes, that would have been the year; a few weeks before all that trouble began. Ernest made him go."

"Was Charles easily influenced by his brother?"

"Yes, always. He was by far the weaker. I am certain that it was Ernest who thought of that wretched stocks and shares business, and persuaded Charles to go in with him. Oh yes, Ernest was always

the leader. As little chaps, I can remember many a childish escapade which Ernest always thought of, and Charles, being passionately devoted to his brother, invariably followed."

"Do you imagine that that devotion has endured?"

"I cannot speak about the present moment, but it was certainly as strong as ever when Charles went away. Ernest realised that he was responsible and insisted upon his brother keeping out of the trouble. I know that Charles was willing to stay and face it, but Ernest simply made him go."

"Are they alike in appearance, Mrs. Lancing?"

"No. Ernest is dark, I dare say he is grey now, like myself. Charles had a florid complexion and reddish hair."

"Have you any relations named Maguire?"

"Maguire? No, not that I am aware of."

"Have you ever heard either of your brothers mention that name?"

"The name certainly seems familiar, but I can't connect it with either Charles or Ernest." Suddenly Mrs. Lancing's face became the colour of white linen and her lips quivered with half repressed agitation. "Haven't I read something in the papers recently about a woman of that name being murdered on the Riviera?"

"It is quite possible that you did."

"You . . . you don't . . . you don't mean to say that either of them had anything to do with it. Oh, for dear God's sake don't say that!"

"The young man for whom I am working has been charged with murdering that woman," Crow answered evasively.

"But Charles and Ernest? They . . . they . . . oh, why are you making all these enquiries about them? Were they connected with it?"

"I can only tell you that your brother, Ernest, has been employed for the last two years, as butler, by the murdered woman."

"Ernest a butler! I . . . I can't believe it! There must be some mistake. Of course it could not be he. He's never done such work in his life. Mrs. Lancing appeared to be less anxious now. When he left school he went into a bank. He's always been interested in that sort of thing; banking and stocks and shares. Why, I doubt if he would know how to lay a table properly. No, no, you must be mistaken. It must be someone else of the same name."

"I am afraid, Mrs. Lancing, there can be no doubt. Records at Scotland Yard have established the fact that Ernest Boughton, Miss Maguire's butler, and Ernest Rayner are the same person." Martin Crow took up his hat. "I am greatly obliged to you for permitting me to question you. There is just one other thing that I should like to know; is your brother, Charles, left-handed by any chance?"

She looked at him sharply. Her lips moved as if she were on the point of answering, but she remained silent.

"The question is an important one, Mrs. Lancing, and your answer may make all the difference to the young man who has been accused of committing a crime of which, I am certain, he is innocent."

There came a long silence. Mrs. Lancing had stood up and was clasping and unclasping her hands, and her tear stained eyes were roving restlessly round the room.

"He was left-handed. Does that help him or make matters worse?"

"According to the opinion of the French police it makes no difference whatever to him," said Martin Crow. To his relief Mrs. Lancing accepted the assurance.

CHAPTER XXI

CROW VISITS CHURCH MORTIMER

HALF way down Richmond Hill Martin Crow turned into a side street and entered the post office where he spent nearly half an hour composing a telegram to Gerry. He asked her to find out from Coral Trent, as soon as possible, the exact date when Miss Maguire arrived in Australia in 1927; the port at which she had disembarked, if she had been alone; and whether Coral had ever heard of anyone named Charles Carthew or Charles Rayner. Having dispatched the wire Crow returned to his hotel, packed his bag and caught the first train to Waterloo.

Gerry's reply did not arrive until the following afternoon. Miss Maguire, she said, had landed at Sydney some time during the first week of April: she had not been accompanied by anyone but, after greeting her relatives on the quay she had waved to a middle-aged man on the ship and had called out something about meeting him in Melbourne during the summer. Coral did not recollect having heard of anyone named Charles Rayner or Charles Carthew. She was under the impression that her aunt had gone out by the Australian Line, but could not remember the name of the boat.

Martin Crow read Gerry's reply a second time and then went out. He walked along the Embankment, up Northumberland Avenue and entered the offices of the Australian Line in Cockspur Street, where he gave his card and asked to see the manager. After waiting for a few minutes he was shown into an inner office.

"I am going to make rather an unusual request," he said when he had been asked to sit down, "but when I tell you that I am acting in the interests of a young Englishman who is being held by the French police on a charge of having murdered his aunt, I think that you may be disposed to assist me."

"The Crime at the Villa Gloria?" questioned the manager, quoting from the popular newspaper headings.

"Correct. In my opinion there is no doubt whatever as to Michael Maguire's innocence, and I have set myself the task of finding the murderer since the French police do not seem disposed to make any wider investigations."

"Then what can I do for you, Mr. Crow?"

"I happen to know that Miss Maguire, the murdered woman, went out to Australia and landed at Sydney at the beginning of April, 1927; and my informant thinks that she travelled on one of your boats. Now, can you let me see the passenger list of the liner which would have arrived at Sydney at that time?"

"I'll see what can be done," the manager replied as he rang a bell on his desk. A moment later a

young man entered the room and was told to look up the list. Five minutes later he came back with two large volumes which he put down on the manager's desk and indicated the pages which gave the information Crow required.

"The *Victoria* arrived at Sydney on April 1st, 1927; and the *Queensland* on the 8th," the manager said. "Perhaps you would like to look down the two lists, Mr. Crow?"

Martin Crow spent ten minutes going carefully down each column of names.

"I am sorry to have troubled you," he said as he looked up with a disappointed expression. "The two names which I hoped to find are not there."

"Perhaps they sailed on one of the 'Oriental' boats," the manager suggested.

"That is a possibility. I came to you first because there was an indication that Miss Maguire patronised your line. I am obliged to you for the trouble you have taken."

"It is nothing, Mr. Crow. Good day."

Martin Crow went out and a few yards along the street he entered the offices of the Oriental Steamship Company and again asked for the manager. This time he did not give trouble in vain. Miss Jennifer Maguire had booked a first class return passage to Sydney and had left England on the *Emperor of Australia*, from which she had landed on the 5th of April. Crow also discovered that a man named Charles Carthew had joined the boat

at Marseilles, having booked a single first class passage from that port to Melbourne.

Crow thanked the manager warmly and hurried away in the direction of Scotland Yard. On arrival there he asked for his friend the Assistant Commissioner.

"You're looking tired, Martin. You are overdoing it," Sir Edward said.

Crow lowered his massive form into an arm-chair and smiled.

"You are talking abject nonsense," he replied. "However, I did not come here to discuss my state of health, which was never better, I came to ask if you were ready to do me another service?"

"We are always ready to do anything to help you, my dear Martin, provided it is reasonable. What is it this time?"

"I want a few enquiries made in Sydney and Melbourne."

The Assistant Commissioner let forth a low whistle.

"You always did like painting your pictures on a large canvas, didn't you?" he said as he lighted a cigarette. "The last case in which we helped you embraced half a dozen European and one South American country, if I remember correctly."

"Ah, the Ambassador's missing daughter! Yes, by Jove, that was a lively affair, bubbling over with exotic romance. I'm afraid this case is entirely commonplace, but it's ten times more important."

"Well, who's been getting into trouble down under?"

"No one, so far as I know. Now, to begin with, my dear Edward, I have established, beyond all reasonable doubt, that your Charles Rayner and my Charles Carthew are the same person; and I have just discovered that an individual using the latter name, and Miss Jennifer Maguire—the murdered woman in my case—both travelled to Australia on the *Emperor of Australia* in 1927. She landed at Sydney on April 5th, and he, apparently, went on to Melbourne; having booked a single passage from Marseilles. Miss Maguire went to stay with relatives a few hundred miles inland from Sydney but I have good reason for supposing that she and Charles Carthew met again sometime during the summer in Melbourne. Now, I want any information that you can get concerning either of them."

"It should not be difficult to get at least a verification of what you have just told me," said Sir Edward who had been making notes on a pad, "but it is possible that their movements after their landing at their respective ports were such that nothing will be known of them."

"I am quite prepared for that," said Crow, "and I really have no particular reason for supposing that anything will be known about them; but there is always a chance that something will turn up. Of course it is the man who interests me most. All that I can tell you about him is that he probably left Australia not later than eighteen months ago. It might be of considerable assistance if I could

discover the exact date when he left, by what boat he sailed, and where he landed."

"Well, we'll see what we can do, Martin. It may take time, of course."

"Yes, it is possible that you will hear nothing before I return to Roquebrune, in which case I will ask you to wire me whatever information you receive."

"When are you likely to go back?"

"I should like to get away the day after to-morrow, but I am going to Church Mortimer this evening and I don't know how long I may be kept there. In the meantime, Edward, I wonder if you would mind making out an official report on those fingerprints, and your records relating to the two Rayners. If I can produce something of that sort, bearing your office stamp, I think I may be able to induce the Commissaire at Nice to set young Maguire free."

"You shall have a report to-morrow. I will send it round to King's Bench Walk."

"You are a good friend, Edward," said Crow as he got up, "and I am eternally grateful to you. Some day I hope that I may have an opportunity of doing something in re——"

"Get along with you, Martin and don't blither," laughed the Assistant Commissioner as he pushed his friend towards the door. "I suppose there isn't much chance of your dining with us."

"I'm not so sure about that. If you have no engagement to-morrow night, and I manage to get back in time, I should like to look you up."

"Splendid! Marion and I will be doing nothing, so we shall just expect you to turn up if you can."

"You don't mind leaving it like that?"

"Of course not."

"Then I shall hope to be with you to-morrow," said Crow as he took his departure.

That evening Martin Crow arrived at Church Mortimer where he engaged a room at the Mortimer Arms. As he entered the dining-room, rather late, he saw Stephen Chart who had nearly finished his meal. He went across and sat at the same table.

"I was half expecting you to look in at my office on Wednesday," the solicitor said.

"Yes, I said I might, didn't I?" Crow replied. "Unfortunately I was detained at Bournemouth that day. I rang up your office just before I left town this afternoon and was told that I should probably find you here."

"You have come here specially to see me?" asked Chart, a little surprised.

"No, I was coming in any case, but I am very glad of the opportunity to have a talk with you. It is possible that you may be able to help me. Have you ever heard of anyone named Rayner in connection with Miss Maguire?"

"Rayner. I have a client of that name, a Mrs. Audrey Rayner, but she and Miss Maguire were not acquainted, so far as I am aware."

Martin Crow shook his head.

"The name is not uncommon, of course," he observed. "No, I do not think that your Mrs. Rayner interests me at all. I am concerned with two men; Charles and Ernest Rayner."

"Ernest Rayner!" exclaimed Chart. "Wasn't that the fellow who got seven years in connection with some Bucket Shop frauds a few years back?"

"That is the man."

"But what has he to do with Miss Maguire?"

"That is what I am trying to find out," answered Crow. "You see, Ernest Rayner and Ernest Boughton, Miss Maguire's butler, are the same person."

"You don't say so."

"And Charles Carthew, to whom your late client was making quarterly payments, is his brother."

"Well I'm damned!"

"That is what I feel like exclaiming, Mr. Chart, because I am certain that the relationship between that man and Miss Maguire holds the key to the mystery of the murder at the Villa Gloria; and at present I cannot see what the relationship could have been."

"You think that it was he who murdered her?" asked Chart.

Crow shrugged.

"If I allowed myself to jump to conclusions I should probably say that he did, but in the absense of a clear motive I prefer to withhold judgment until I am in possession of more information. Would it bore you very much to hear what I have been discovering since I got back to England?"

"Good heavens, no. I should be most interested."

As Crow dined—Stephen Chart had already reached the coffee stage—he told his companion about Boughton's fingerprints, of his visits to Mr. and Mrs. Potts at Maidenhead; of his talk with Mrs. Lancing; the telegram from Gerry, and all about the information which he had obtained from the offices of the Oriental Line.

"Hm it seems to point pretty clearly to either Ernest or Charles Rayner, don't you think?" asked the solicitor.

"Very clearly," replied Crow. "But don't you see my difficulty at the moment? On the face of what I have discovered I suspect Ernest of having planned the murder and Charles of having committed it."

"What are you going on, your left-handed theory?"

"Partly."

"You are still convinced on that point?"

"Absolutely."

"You didn't convince the Commissaire at Nice, did you?"

"No, I didn't, but you must remember that he, and especially the Examining Magistrate, have got it firmly fixed in their heads that Michael Maguire is their man. But I was going to say, my difficulty is that I cannot see why either Ernest or Charles Rayner should have wished for Miss Maguire's death."

"You don't think that that fellow, Berwick, came in to it somehow?"

"I am pretty certain that he did not commit the crime. I don't believe that he has an ounce of courage. He wouldn't have the nerve to do such a thing. Everything that the sister told me points to Ernest having planned the thing and other things indicate that Charles did the foul deed; but I always find myself up against the same question—motive."

For some moments there was silence between the two men. Stephen Chart had lighted a cigarette and was watching the smoke curling lazily upwards.

"Has it occurred to you," he said, at length, "that Berwick may have been in it, passively?"

"How?"

"He admitted to you that he wanted to marry the girl, Coral Trent?"

"Yes."

"And it is probable that he only wanted to marry her for the money which she was going to inherit from her aunt?"

"Agreed."

"A matter of some £50,000."

"Yes."

"Now, isn't it most likely that the butler knew that the girl was to inherit the fortune and made a proposal to Berwick to the effect that if Miss Maguire were disposed of, so that he and Coral could marry and get the money, that a proportion of it should be made over to him, Boughton?"

Crow considered this suggestion for some moments.

"It is possible, but not likely, I think. Don't forget that it is the girl, not Berwick, who inherits."

"I know, I know, but I don't think that that point is important. Coral Trent, as anyone can see with half an eye, has no knowledge of business matters. In many ways she is like a child of fourteen. It would not be very difficult for a man like Ernest Rayner to get control of that money if he had come to some arrangement with Berwick."

Another silence.

"What you suggest may be a possible explanation," Crow admitted, "but it strikes me as being rather involved. I think that if Boughton, or Rayner, whichever we call him, had designs on that money he would have worked to get it direct, not through Berwick."

"Well, that was possibly his intention. I am convinced that something of that kind happened, or was planned by the butler. In what other way could those two men have hoped to benefit by my late client's death?"

"Yes, I admit that there is something to be said for your argument," Crow conceded, but in his heart he felt that Stephen Chart was wrong.

"What I suggest is consistent with Berwick's behaviour," the solicitor persisted. "From the moment when you first met him he has tried to deceive you on every possible occasion. By the way, I suppose you heard that he has disappeared?"

"Yes, my daughter wrote and told me."

"Everything that he has said and done has suggested, to my mind at any rate, that he is guilty, in some way."

"And you think that he struck the fatal blow?" Crow asked.

"When you first sat down here I should have replied in the affirmative," answered Chart, "but now I am ready to admit that your discoveries about Ernest and Charles Rayner make a difference. Berwick may only have been an accessory. What are you hoping to find out here?"

"I hardly know. I am going to see Dr. Mason who, I imagine, was Miss Maguire's medical attendant, and sponsored Ernest Boughton's application for his passport. I may see if I can learn anything from the Chief Constable."

"When are you returning to Roquebrune?"

"The day after to-morrow, I hope."

"It is possible that you may hear something from Australia before then?"

"I doubt it, but I think that I may have sufficient evidence without that to enable me to secure Michael Maguire's release. How long are you staying here?"

"I shall be leaving by an early train in the morning. I had to come to arrange with the housekeeper at Merryfields for the payment of the monthly wages, and the general upkeep of the place. You are going to see the doctor to-night?"

Crow looked at his watch.

"It is not yet nine, I think I will see if he is in. It might not be easy to catch him in the morning."

CHAPTER XXII

THE RECTOR'S SECRET

DR. MASON was an elderly man who had ministered to the ailments, real and imaginary, of the "county" for nearly half a century. He had been unusually busy all day and was enjoying a much-needed rest when the maid handed him Crow's card and said that she had shown the visitor into the next room.

"Martin Crow, K.C. What does he want?"

"I don't know, sir, he didn't say. He's a very tall man and doesn't look as if there was much the matter with him."

The doctor drew himself out of his chair with an effort and laid aside his pipe, which was only half smoked. He went into the adjoining room and was unable to conceal his annoyance at being disturbed at an hour when he hoped that his work was done for that day.

"Good evening, sir," he said, speaking brusquely. "What is it you wish to see me about?"

"I am not a patient, Dr. Mason, and I must apologise for troubling you so late," replied Crow in his most charming manner. "Am I correct in

assuming that you were the late Miss Maguire's medical attendant?"

"Yes, indeed I was," said the doctor, less curtly. "Won't you sit down. You must forgive me if I appeared to be a little short as I came in. I have had a particularly tiring day and Miss Maguire's tragic death has upset us all a great deal. You were acquainted with her, Mr. Crow?"

Martin Crow explained briefly his connection with the case.

"Yes, we read in the paper that Michael had been arrested. It is inconceivable that he should have done such a thing."

"Do you know him well, Dr. Mason?"

"I have known him ever since his parents died, when he was quite a child. But what object could he possibly have had in killing his aunt, who was doing so much for him? You know, of course, that Miss Maguire was responsible for his education and was making it possible for him to become a doctor?"

"Yes, I know that," Crow replied, and then he outlined the case against Michael from the point of view of the French police.

Dr. Mason remained silent for some moments.

"That sounds very serious," he said, presently. "But even so I cannot imagine him doing such a thing. There must be some mistake, Mr. Crow."

"I know there is, and that is why I am interesting myself on his behalf, and why I have come to Church Mortimer to see you."

"But how can I be of any assistance, except, perhaps, by telling you what I know of him?"

"As a matter of fact I do not wish to know anything about him, it is information concerning someone else that I want. Will you permit me to ask you several questions? I will not detain you a moment longer than is absolutely necessary."

"Please do not hurry yourself, Mr. Crow. This is a very grave matter, and I shall be only too pleased if I can do anything, or say anything, that will help Michael. When I was told that you wanted to see me I imagined that it was someone who wished me to prescribe for a stomach ache, or a sick headache. People worry one on the least provocation and it generally ends in my giving them a dose of salts which they could easily have obtained from the chemist. Now, what is it that you want to know?"

"How long have you known Miss Maguire?"

"Ever since I came here, forty-five years ago."

"How would you describe her, in character?"

"That is something of a poser, Mr. Crow," replied the doctor after a moment's pause. "Miss Maguire was, in many ways, a remarkable woman; an autocrat; high-principled, generous where needy people and institutions were concerned; very business-like; she never owed a penny in her life; she was a thoroughly good woman but, I must admit, she had her peculiarities."

"In what way?"

"She had clearly defined ideas about things, and

expected everyone about her to conform to those ideas."

"Can you account for her severe treatment of her nephew regarding her wish that he should marry his cousin?"

"I cannot, Mr. Crow, and yet I am not altogether surprised that she should have adopted that attitude. I have no doubt that she considered it was for his and the girl's good. Very likely she allowed the idea to get on her brain."

"In that particular respect she hardly seemed to be human."

"Granted. I cannot defend it, but I happen to know that she was actuated by a problem which was causing her considerable uneasiness."

"You refer to the attentions which were being paid to her niece by a certain young man?" Crow asked.

"Ah, you know all about that?"

"I got it from Alan Berwick himself."

"Then I suppose there is no need for me to remain silent upon that point. Yes, Miss Maguire strongly disapproved of him and forbade him to enter her house, but he was, I understand, persistent, and made every effort to meet the young lady secretly. Miss Maguire had reasons, probably very good reasons, for supposing that the attraction was, not the young lady herself, but the money which she would some day inherit; and she naturally wished to put a stop to that state of affairs."

"I am going to be frank, Dr. Mason. The evidence in this case does not preclude Alan Berwick from being suspected of either having committed the crime, or of having been in some way concerned with it. Would you be surprised if you learnt that he had murdered Miss Maguire?"

"Yes, I should," replied the doctor.

"May I ask why?"

"In many ways Alan Berwick is still a child, and I do not think that he has the brain to plan anything of that kind; or the courage, unless, of course, he were roused to a sudden heat of uncontrolled rage."

"You know him well?"

"No, not very well, but I have known him all his life. As a matter of fact I brought him into the world."

"Would you describe him as a degenerate?"

Dr. Mason looked at Crow with surprise.

"That is rather a strong term to use, isn't it?"

"Too strong?"

"Yes, I think it is, although I can guess what is in your mind. He is morally weak, that cannot be denied. Do you, personally, suspect him of having committed this crime?"

"No, I am inclined to agree with you that he would not have sufficient courage to do a thing like that in cold blood; and there is no question of his having been roused to a sudden passion of anger. I questioned you about him because I was seeking for support to my own views. He has been behaving in a very extraordinary manner since Miss Maguire's

death; in fact the last that I heard of him was that he had suddenly disappeared."

"Took fright, probably," said the doctor. "That is just what I should have expected him to do if he imagined that he was under suspicion. Alan never did have any backbone, even as a schoolboy. He always took what he considered to be the easiest path, and never appeared to have any ambition. That, no doubt, is why he failed to take his degree at Oxford and made no attempt to practise after he had been called to the Bar. His father left him an income of three or four hundred a year and he saw no reason why he should bother to work for his living."

"He had extravagant tastes, I imagine?" questioned Crow.

"Yes. His mother has been obliged to pay his debts, pretty heavy debts, more than once since he came of age. I am telling you all this, Mr. Crow, because it is known to everyone. You have only to ask any of the people who live here and they would tell you the same."

"I understand. Now, Dr. Mason, there is one other point about which I wish to consult you. I am told that you vouched for the identity of Miss Maguire's butler when he applied for a passport about two years ago?"

"Yes, for Boughton."

"You knew the man?"

"I had attended him once or twice, professionally, and I always saw him whenever I went to the house."

"I suppose you signed his application form at Miss Maguire's request?"

"Yes, but may I ask you why you are interested in his passport?"

"Because his name is not Boughton but Rayner."

"Rayner! But . . . but this is rather a serious matter, isn't it?"

"You acted in good faith and at the request of his employer."

"But even so I——"

"You could hardly be blamed, Dr. Mason. Boughton, or rather Rayner, is known to the police. He was serving a term of imprisonment not long before he entered Miss Maguire's service."

"Good Heavens! I always took him for a manservant of the good, old-fashioned type. Are you quite sure of your facts, Mr. Crow?"

"I am going entirely upon information supplied to me by the Assistant Commissioner of Police at Scotland Yard."

"Does Boughton come into this case?"

"That is what I am trying to find out; the reason, in fact, for my visit to Church Mortimer. I am pretty certain that he does, but I have no proof."

"Dear me! How very careful one ought to be over matters of that sort. I trust that there will not be any trouble: over the passport, I mean."

"I do not think that is likely, Doctor," said Crow as he stood up. "I am very much obliged to you."

"I am glad if I have been of any assistance to you. Do you know what will be happening to Merryfields?"

"Miss Maguire's lawyer is here now, making arrangements for the property to be kept in order. I understand that Michael Maguire inherits the place."

"You do not doubt his ability to prove his innocence, I hope."

"I think that is only a matter of time; in fact I am hoping that I may obtain sufficient evidence to secure his release as soon as I return to the South of France."

"I am glad, Mr. Crow. Michael Maguire was always a favourite of mine; in fact there was an understanding between us that he should come to me as soon as he qualified, as an assistant, with a view to a partnership after a year or two. Perhaps you would be good enough to drop me a line to say how matters are progressing, as far as he is concerned?"

"I will most certainly let you know directly I have any news," Crow replied.

Major Armytage, the Chief Constable, was a bluff, red-faced little man who had an exaggerated notion of his own importance, and never having heard of Martin Crow, he seemed to regard his visitor as an interloper.

"I am sorry, sir," he said in a curt tone, "but my position forbids me to give information unofficially. If

Scotland Yard takes the matter up and communicates with me I shall, of course, answer their questions."

Crow was disappointed but not surprised. During the ten years which he had devoted to the investigation of crime he had become so well known to Chief Constables and police officers in all parts of the country that he usually had little difficulty in obtaining their help; but there were occasions, like the present one, when he came up against someone who had never heard of his existence and refused all assistance.

As Crow walked away from Major Armytage's office it seemed to him that there was now no object in spending any more time at Church Mortimer and he decided that he would send a wire to Sir Edward to say that he would dine with him and Lady Berring that evening. As he was dispatching the telegram an idea occurred to him and he put through a telephone call to Merryfields. He asked for the housekeeper, who informed him that Miss Maguire had always been in the habit of attending church at the village of Arleford, a couple of miles from Church Mortimer, and that the rector's name was the Reverend William Mold. Crow at once hired a car and drove to the Rectory, where he handed his card to the maid and asked if she would take it to her master. After waiting for two or three minutes he was shown into the study, a large, pleasant room which looked on to a broad stretch of well-kept lawn. The Reverend William Mold was standing

behind his writing-desk. He was a shy, middle-aged man who extended a warm, moist hand and invited the visitor to take a chair.

"Of course I know your name very well, Mr. Crow," he said as he sat down and straightened one or two things on the desk. "And what may I . . . er . . . have the pleasure of . . . er . . . doing for you?"

"I am hoping that you may be good enough to tell me something about the late Miss Maguire who, I understand, was one of your parishioners. You have heard, of course?"

The Rector assumed a grave expression.

"I have been laid up with influenza for the past fortnight," he said, "and my wife only told me the sad news this morning. It came as a very great shock to me."

"I can well believe that, Mr. Mold."

"Miss Maguire was a most generous supporter of my church and she will be greatly missed? You knew her?"

"No. I happened to be staying near her villa in the South of France and became acquainted with the young lady to whom her nephew was engaged to be married."

"Ah, Michael!" exclaimed the Reverend William. "Is it really true, Mr. Crow, that he had been arrested and charged with murder?"

"Quite true, and it is because of his unfortunate position that I have come to England to make

certain enquiries on his behalf. You may know that since I gave up my practice I have devoted myself to criminal investigation."

"I was not aware of that fact, Mr. Crow, but I can well imagine that your vast knowledge would be of the greatest assistance to you in dealing with cases of this kind. You do not think that he killed his aunt?"

"No, I am certain that he did not, and I am glad to say that I think I am well on the road to tracing the person who did commit the crime. At the moment, however, my chain of information is incomplete, and I am hoping that you may be instrumental in filling in the gaps for me."

There was a moment's silence during which the rector moved some more of the things on his desk.

"How can I do that?" he asked at length, without looking up.

"You have known Miss Maguire for some time?" Crow asked.

"For nearly twenty years."

"Can you tell me how many near relatives she had?"

The Reverend William Mold gave Crow a quick glance, and then turned his eyes towards the open window.

"When I knew Miss Maguire first," he said, reverting to his visitor, "her father was alive and her sister, Annie, was at home. They are both dead and, as far as I know, her nephew Michael Maguire,

and her niece, Miss Trent, are now her only living relatives."

"She had no brothers?"

"No."

"And Mrs. Trent was her only sister?"

"Yes."

"You have never heard of any uncles or aunts, or cousins?"

"No, in fact it was only last summer that Miss Maguire told me that Michael and Miss Trent were her only relations."

"Since you have known her, Mr. Mold, have you ever met anyone, or heard of anyone, named Rayner?"

"No one in any way connected with Miss Maguire."

"Or Carthew?"

Crow noticed that the Rector started, almost imperceptibly, and then lowered his eyes to the manuscript of a sermon which lay on the desk before him.

"I have never met anyone of that name," he replied in a voice which was not controlled.

"But you have heard the name mentioned by Miss Maguire?" Crow asked, eagerly. He was watching the rector expectantly. Was he about to learn something which would give him the key to his problem?

"Yes, I am compelled to admit that I have heard Miss Maguire mention it," the Reverend William Mold said after a long pause.

"In what connection?"

The Rector passed his hand across his eyes and

leant back in his chair. A full minute passed before he spoke.

"I am sorry, Mr. Crow, but I am not at liberty to answer that question. About seven years ago I was entrusted with a secret and at the same time I was asked to do something in the event of Miss Maguire's death. I was asked to give certain information to her lawyer, a Mr. Stephen Chart. Barely half an hour ago I gave a letter, containing that information to the maid and told her to post it at once."

"It concerns someone named Carthew?" asked Crow.

"Forgive me, but I would sooner not answer any further questions. May I suggest that you communicate with Mr. Stephen Chart who will, perhaps, if he thinks fit, pass on to you the information contained in my letter to him. You have his address?"

"Yes, I have it. As a matter of fact Mr. Chart was staying at Church Mortimer last night and is now on his way back to London."

"Indeed. It is possible that my communication to him may be of some assistance to you. . . . I take it that there is no doubt about Michael's ability to clear himself?"

"I do not think there is any doubt, Mr. Mold."

"I am thankful to hear you say that. He is a good fellow, I am sure. Forgive me if I do not come to the door with you," the Rector went on as he rang the bell. "I am still trying to take care of myself as I wish to be able to take my services next Sunday."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE KEY TO THE PROBLEM

WHEN Martin Crow returned to his home from Church Mortimer he found a letter from Gerry waiting for him.

"We have just had another visit from M. Peille," she wrote. "I really feel quite sorry for the little man; he seems to have got into such a hopeless muddle over the case. He is obviously deeply impressed by the work which you have already done, and, in spite of what he, himself, may be inclined to think, can't help hoping that you may be on the right track. Against this he has to contend with the Juge d'Instruction, who is annoyed with him for letting you butt in. If it weren't for the Juge and the Préfet I believe that M. Peille would be willing to release Michael on parole. As it is, I fear that you will have to come along with some pretty conclusive evidence against someone else, before he will consent to do that.

"M. Peille has made an exhaustive search for the revolver which fired that shot at you. He says that it is not at the villa and he is sure that Boughton is not carrying it about with him. In view of Alan Berwick's sudden and mysterious disappearance, he is convinced that it was he who wanted to get rid of you.

"M. Peille has caused enquiries to be made all along the coast for Charles Carthew, and it has been found that a man answering his description took a ticket at

Monte Carlo, for Marseilles, on the night of the murder. The Marseilles police are now trying to find him there, and enquiries are also being made at Ajaccio.

"We have been over to Nice every other day and Alison has seen Michael for a few minutes each time. She has just heard from her employer who has told her not to think about returning until the affair is settled, and he is paying her in full during her absence.

"We are wondering when you will be back and are most anxious to hear if you have met with any real success in England. I hope the information which I obtained from Coral Trent and telegraphed was of some value.

"Love from
"GERRY."

Martin Crow put the letter in his pocket and went into his room to dress for his dinner with the Berrings. When he arrived at the house in Palace Gate he was relieved to find that he was the only guest, for he was tired after his day's exertions and did not feel in the mood for being formal. Having him to themselves he knew that Sir Edward would want to know all about his visit to Church Mortimer, and replying to his friend would not worry him. On the contrary, Crow welcomed the opportunity to discuss the case. He always found that it helped him when he was able to express his ideas aloud; provided the ideas were sufficiently formulated.

"I felt that I was on the point of solving the whole problem when that parson admitted that he had heard the name Carthew mentioned in connection with Miss Maguire," Crow said after they had left

the dining-room and were sitting in the lounge drinking their coffee.

"And he would tell you no more?" asked Sir Edward.

"No, he advised me to communicate with the lawyer to whom he had passed on this secret information."

"Have you any idea at all as to its nature?"

"None. My theory has always been that the person who killed Miss Maguire was someone who imagined that, in the absence of any will, he, or she, would inherit the fortune as her next-of-kin," Crow answered.

"What made you come to that conclusion?"

"It was the only way in which I could account for the destruction of the wills. The only other way of looking at it was to assume that the nephew was guilty; had been consumed by avarice and had hoped to inherit the whole fortune instead of half. That, I considered, was out of the question."

"Tell me, Martin, how you set to work on a case of that sort," Sir Edward asked, as he cut a cigar.

"You see, you and I look at cases from totally different angles, at least I suppose we do. Roughly speaking we collect all the available evidence and if it points to a particular individual we arrest him. Now, in this case of yours that, presumably, is precisely what the French police did—one could hardly expect them to do otherwise—but your position is entirely different. You, I imagine, ignored

all the evidence which appeared to incriminate the nephew and began searching for something which might enable you to drop on to someone else. Now in such cases—and most of yours must be the same—what makes you assume that the suspected person is innocent? That, I suppose is what you have to start by doing?”

“You have more or less answered the question yourself,” Crow replied. “Necessity made me assume that Michael Maguire was innocent and that the evidence upon which the police had based their charge was capable of being interpreted differently. In all such cases where I am called upon to help the accused, I have to have a starting point, and the only possible one is the assumption of innocence.”

“Did you work on the same principle when you were pleading for accused people?” asked Lady Berring.

“Invariably.”

“But weren’t there occasions when you felt pretty certain that the accused was guilty?”

“Admittedly there were.”

“That is a point which has always interested me,” said his hostess. “It seems so strange to me that a lawyer can stand up and plead for a man whom he thinks is guilty.”

“It is not really strange, Marion, if you consider the question broadly,” Crow replied. “You must remember this, no one can be certain of a man’s guilt unless he has actually seen the man committing the

crime; and even then there may be extenuating circumstances which have to be taken into consideration. After all, you have a very similar, but reversed, position with a prosecuting counsel who is demanding a man's life, when he knows that his evidence is not infallible."

"Yes, I always feel that that is an interesting point. Ah! The telephone. Excuse me," Sir Edward said as he got up and went across to the instrument which stood on a table at the far end of the room. "Hullo . . . yes, Sir Edward Berring speaking. . . . Ah! is that you, Inspector? Splendid. . . . Anything interesting? . . . Good. Send a messenger round with it at once, will you? Good night." Sir Edward put down the receiver and went back to his chair. "News for you from Australia, Martin," he said.

"Already! What is it?"

"I fancy that you are going to receive a pleasant surprise," the Assistant Commissioner said as he sat down. "Your fellow, Charles Carthew, was arrested in Melbourne in September, 1927, on a charge of robbery with violence and was sentenced to five years' penal. His arrest took place a few hours after he had married Miss Jennifer Maguire."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Crow. "What a consummate fool I've been!"

"But why this self-condemnation, my dear Martin?" asked Lady Berring.

"Because it is so obvious now that one knows it; but it ought to have been obvious all along. There

is the key to the whole thing. As her husband he would inherit all her money, provided no will could be found."

"I don't see how you could have been expected to guess that a severe, middle-aged spinster, presumably eminently respectable, had secretly married a scoundrel like that," said Sir Edward. "It was about the least likely thing to have happened."

"Edward!" said Crow severely, "I am surprised to hear a man of your experience and position talking like that. Don't you know that it is these unexpected things which do happen, and if I hadn't been a blind fool I should have tumbled to it. Are they sending the cable round?"

"Yes, it should be here at any minute. But to go back to your censure of myself, Martin," Sir Edward said with a smile, "I accept it from you, but I don't agree with you. No mind can legislate for every possibility."

Crow ran his fingers through his short, stubbly hair.

"Perhaps you are right," he said with a sigh, "but I can't help feeling that I ought to have thought of it, for the simple reason that it supplies the only possible explanation for the destruction of the will. Moreover——"

At that moment a man-servant entered the room with an envelope on a salver. Sir Edward tore it open and glanced at the enclosure which he at once handed to Crow.

"Read it to us, Martin," he said. "It is, of course, a decoded transcription."

Martin Crow moved across to another chair where there was a better light. The sheet which he held in his hand bore the official heading of Scotland Yard and typed across the top was the inscription: "Copy of cable received from the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Melbourne, Australia: dated April 4th, 193-

"In reply to enquiries re Miss Jennifer Maguire who landed at Sydney from *Emperor of Australia*, 5th of April, 1927, and Charles Carthew who landed from the same boat at Melbourne, 8th of April, 1927. The latter came under our notice during August of that year when a warrant was issued for his arrest on a charge of robbery with violence. His arrest was effected on September 10th following, as he was about to embark for England. A few hours previously Carthew had married Miss Jennifer Maguire. He was tried and sentenced to five years' penal servitude at Melbourne, and was released in October, 1931. His wife attended the trial and walked out of court directly the verdict was given. She sailed a week later for England.'"

When he had finished reading the cable Martin Crow sat with his brows knit and his eyes fixed upon the pattern of the carpet.

"What is troubling you now?" Sir Edward asked.

Crow looked up with a start.

"What was that? I'm sorry. I had lost myself for a moment. I was wondering why he was embarking for England when he was arrested."

"You mean that he should have known that England was not going to welcome him with open arms?"

"Yes."

"I should think it is very likely that he did not intend coming here. Perhaps they had arranged to step off at Marseilles, and spend the winter on the Riviera. Or, who knows but what he may have planned murdering her as far back as that, on the boat, or in France, when they landed."

"Yes, that is possible," Crow agreed. "May I keep this cable?"

"Of course. You may have the original if it is likely to be of any use to you."

"Yes, I think I'd better have them both. I will call for it in the morning."

"When are you leaving?"

"Some time to-morrow. I must see Stephen Chart, Miss Maguire's lawyer, before I go. I think I may fly to Paris and catch the Blue Train there. And now, Marion, my dear, I think I shall say good night. I see that I am going to have another very busy day to-morrow."

"You need not trouble to come round for that cable, Martin, I'll send it to you so that you get it by half past ten. Will that be soon enough?" asked Sir Edward.

"Good gracious yes. I shan't get off until after lunch."

"Now is there anything else that the Yard can do for you?"

"The Yard has already excelled itself on my behalf," Crow replied as he shook hands with his hostess, "and I hope I shall not want to trouble it again, just yet. I don't know what you said to those Australian people to get their reply so quickly, Edward."

"Ah, we have our methods, Martin, for putting them on their mettle," the Assistant Commissioner replied.

Shortly after ten o'clock the following morning Martin Crow was shown into Mr. Stephen Chart's room at the offices of Chart, Blagrove & Chart, in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"You are the very man I want to see," the lawyer exclaimed. "I have just been reading a most extraordinary letter from——"

"The Reverend William Mold," Crow broke in, "and he informs you that the lady who recently met her death at the Villa Gloria, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, was Mrs. Charles Carthew."

"How on earth did you know that?" demanded the amazed lawyer. "This parson says that he and his wife were the only people who knew anything about it."

"Mr. Mold seems to have forgotten the existence of the registrar of marriages in Melbourne."

"You ferreted that out from Australia?" Chart asked.

Crow took the cable from his pocket and handed

it across the desk. Chart read it through and then looked up.

"But how did you know that this Rector had written to me about it?" Crow described his visit to the Reverend William Mold. "Ah, I understand," Chart said. "Well, I think you had better see his letter."

Crow took it and read it.

"DEAR SIR,

"I must explain that I first became acquainted with Miss Jennifer Maguire nearly twenty years ago, when I was appointed to this benefice. Since the death of her father she has been one of my staunchest supporters. About seven years ago Miss Maguire went to Australia to visit her married sister and when she returned, eight or nine months later, my wife and I noticed a marked change in her. It was obvious to us both that something had happened to cause her great distress, and we both made efforts to induce her to unburden herself to us. We were entirely unsuccessful and gave up the attempt.

"Last summer, however, Miss Maguire came to see us and after making us both take a solemn oath of the strictest secrecy, told us that she wished us to assist her. Without displaying the slightest sign of any emotion she briefly told us that while she was in Australia she had married a man named Charles Carthew whom she had met on the boat going out. A few hours after the marriage ceremony this man was arrested as they were about to embark for England. He was tried on a very serious charge—she did not tell us what it was—he was convicted and sentenced to five years' penal servitude.

"Miss Maguire—as I must call her; I could never think of her by any other name—went on to tell us that as she voyaged back to England she became more and

more appalled by the thought of the extreme folly of which she had been guilty, and decided to retain her maiden name and tell no one of her unfortunate marriage. She heard nothing of her husband, it appears, until about fifteen months ago when, in some mysterious way, he discovered that she was living in the South of France and called at her villa. The result of the visit was that Miss Maguire agreed to make this man a liberal yearly allowance as long as she lived, provided that he did not go near her, communicate with her in any way, or make it known to anyone that he was her lawful husband. If he did not strictly comply with those conditions the allowance would cease and she would seek police protection.

"It appears that shortly after this man's visit Miss Maguire became anxious over the possibility that difficulties might arise at her death owing to the fact that her name was really Carthew. For some reason she seemed to regard my wife and myself as the only people whom she could trust with her secret, and she asked us if we would witness her signature to a new will which she was making. She explained that she had caused it to be drawn up in duplicate and had already signed one copy at your office with the name Maguire. The copy which we were to witness she would keep amongst her private papers. In due course my wife and I witnessed her signature to the new will and Miss Maguire then instructed me to write this letter to you in the event of her death.

"I am, yours faithfully,

"WILLIAM MOLD."

"A very remarkable letter," observed Crow as he handed it back to the lawyer.

"Very remarkable. I fancy that it may clear the ground somewhat for you?"

"The news that Charles Carthew, or Charles

Rayner, was her husband certainly explains many things," Crow replied. "With this evidence," he went on, tapping the cable with his finger, "and a report on the two brothers, which the Assistant Commissioner has made out for me, I hope to have young Maguire free almost as soon as I get back to Roquebrune."

"I do not see how they can possibly hold him when you have laid all the facts before them," Chart said.

"No, I think not, but those French police are a pig-headed lot. By the way, what is the position now as regards the will. Does it hold?"

"That is a debatable point, I think," replied Chart. "It is obvious that she was not Jennifer Maguire, but Jennifer Carthew—or perhaps Rayner—when she signed it; but I should say that a judge would uphold it if it were contested. It is obvious that it expresses the woman's wishes, whatever her legal name may have been at the time."

"Quite. I don't think, however, that there will be any quarrelling about it. Michael Maguire, I am sure, will consent to Coral Trent having her share."

CHAPTER XXIV

CROW LAYS DOWN HIS CARDS

BEFORE leaving Paris by the Blue Train, Martin Crow sent a telegram to M. Peille saying that he was returning with much important evidence and would be calling at the Prefecture the following morning, as soon as he arrived in Nice. Both the Commissaire and M. Robin, the Juge d'Instruction, were waiting for him. The former greeted Crow with his usual, genial manner, but the latter was gloomy, and preserved his resentful attitude.

"I trust that you have made a good journey, my dear M. Crow?" said the Commissaire as he shook hands. "You have met M. Robin before, I believe." Crow and the Juge d'Instruction did not shake hands but bowed formally. "Well, you have news for us?" M. Peille asked when they were all seated.

"I have some remarkable news for you, M. Peille, and when you have heard it I think you will agree with me that Michael Maguire should no longer be detained."

"You have conclusive proof that someone else committed the crime?" asked M. Robin, who was lounging back in his chair with his bowler cocked

on one side of his head and a hand-made cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth.

"I consider that I have sufficient evidence to warrant his release," Crow replied, coldly. He disliked the self-assured little juge, who, he knew, did not want to see his labours of the past fortnight swept aside, and the prospect of having to start his investigations afresh.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to give us an account of your enquiries in England?" suggested the Commissaire in a conciliatory tone.

"It is for that purpose that I alighted from my train at Nice and came here without delay," Crow replied. "You are aware, I think, that I have always suspected Boughton of having had something to do with the crime?"

"A man who could have had no possible interest in Mademoiselle's death," interposed M. Robin. Martin Crow ignored the interruption and made all his observations pointedly to M. Peille.

"Directly I arrived in London, M. le Commissaire, I visited Scotland Yard where I asked the Assistant Commissioner to find out if Boughton's fingerprints appeared amongst their collection. I have here a signed report which I will leave with you. In the meantime perhaps you would like me to translate it to you?"

"Please, M. Crow."

"It is headed 'Assistant Commissioner's Office, New Scotland Yard, London,' and is dated April

2nd. It says: 'The finger-print photographs bearing the stamp of the Commissariat of Police at Nice, France, and marked "Ernest Boughton" have been found to correspond with the prints of Ernest Rayner, who was born in London in 1885 and was sentenced in 1910 to five years' imprisonment. In 1927 this man was tried and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude at the Old Bailey for extensive frauds in connection with a share-pushing business. A warrant had been issued for the arrest of his brother, Charles Rayner, but this man had disappeared and has not been traced. It is probable that he left the country.' "

"But what has that to do with the crime at the Villa Gloria?" demanded the Juge d'Instruction, with a note of triumph in his harsh voice. Again Martin Crow ignored him and confined his attention to M. Peille.

"The newspaper reports of the trial of Ernest Rayner enabled me to get into touch with a sister of the two men and from her I learnt that her brother, Charles, had gone to Australia and, moreover, that he has red hair."

"Ah! Charles Carthew, for whom we have been making enquiries," exclaimed the Commissaire. "But this is interesting, M. Crow. When did he go to Australia?"

"In 1927, the same year that Mlle. Maguire went there to visit her sister," replied Crow, who judged it more effective to bring out the various points of his information by slow stages, rather than all at once.

"You think that they were known to each other?" asked M. Peille.

"From the London offices of the Oriental Line I learnt that Mlle. Maguire and Charles Carthew travelled to Australia on the same boat, but I could not say if they had met in England. She landed at Sydney and he went on to Melbourne. When I discovered this I asked Scotland Yard to make enquiries about these two people from the Australian police, and this cable was received in London the day before yesterday. It states that Charles Carthew was arrested in Melbourne on September 10th, 1927, as he was about to embark for England with his wife, otherwise Miss Jennifer Maguire, whom he had married a few hours previously."

"Mlle. Maguire married!" cried the Commissaire. "But this is *formidable*! You never suspected it, M. Crow?"

"No, I am afraid I have been very slow. Her being married explains everything."

"And what happened to this Charles Carthew?"

"The cable says that he was sentenced to five years' penal servitude for robbery with violence. His wife attended the trial and walked out of the court directly she heard the verdict. She sailed for England a few days later."

"And how does the marriage explain everything, M. Crow?" asked M. Robin in a less aggressive tone.

"It gives us a reason for destroying the wills and provides a motive. It has always been the absence

of a motive which has perplexed me when I have been considering Boughton as the murderer, or as an accessory. Curiously enough, M. Peille, the case now centres round a point which you yourself raised in this room when I first came to see you, with the Consul and Maître Corbin. Perhaps you remember that you suggested that Michael Maguire had destroyed the wills so that, as next-of-kin, he would inherit the whole of his aunt's fortune. They were destroyed so that the next-of-kin should inherit; but that person was the lady's lawful husband, Charles Carthew, or Charles Rayner."

"Yes, yes, that is all clear," admitted M. Peille. "Then what part do you think Ernest Boughton played?" he asked.

"I have very good reasons for supposing that he thought the whole thing out. The sister told me that the two brothers had always been devoted to each other and that Ernest had always been the leader; the one who planned everything and persuaded Charles to join him in any enterprise. I can hardly believe that Ernest became Mlle. Maguire's butler by chance. When he heard that his brother was in prison in Australia, and had married a wealthy English woman, he probably schemed to get into her service. Whether Mlle. Maguire ever knew that her butler was her brother-in-law, or was in any way connected with Charles, I cannot say. It is possible that the two men may have tried to blackmail her, but I imagine that she was a woman who

would not have been easily intimidated. It appears to me, from other evidence which I have obtained, that Charles visited his wife and tried to induce her to make him a substantial allowance, but all that he could get was £500 a year, a sum which could hardly have satisfied himself or Ernest. It is probable that Ernest overheard his mistress discussing the terms of her will with Mlle. Trent, and also heard that Michael Maguire was going to be ordered to marry his cousin. Ernest would have foreseen that there would be trouble between aunt and nephew, and realised that his presence at the villa would give them an opportunity to commit a crime for which he, Maguire, would very likely be suspected. You may recollect, M. Peille, that I suspected one of the servants of trying to overhear what was being said when M. Chart was telling us the terms of the will?"

"Yes, yes, I remember."

"Boughton, I imagine, is an accomplished eaves-dropper. I can see him, in my mind, listening in the salon on that Monday night when Mlle. Maguire first told her nephew that he was to marry his cousin; and it is reasonable to suppose that when M. Maguire had gone up to his room, and Mademoiselle was settled with her patience cards, Ernest Boughton went down to the Bar Imbert, told his brother of what he had overheard, and then planned the murder, the manufacture of evidence which would incriminate Maguire; and Charles's subsequent escape."

"Your opinion is that Charles actually killed the woman?" asked the Commissaire.

"Yes."

"Did you happen to find out if he was right or left-handed," asked the Juge d'Instruction, with a generous touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"He is left-handed, M. Robin."

"Do you think that Ernest did anything after he had planned the thing?" asked M. Peille.

"I cannot possibly say," Crow replied. "I think it is probable that he went into the library as soon as the murder was committed, and he may have burnt the wills while Charles was making his escape. No doubt he intended closing and fastening the windows when he had completed his work at the fire and was probably prevented from doing so by hearing Michael Maguire coming down the stairs. He could have hidden behind the curtain over the library door."

"You are assuming that he crept downstairs after he had been seen going to his room by Mlle. Trent."

"Yes."

"And the *mille* notes which were found in M. Maguire's valise, you think that Boughton put them there in order to make suspicion against the young man?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then what have you to say about M. Berwick. Do you think that he had anything to do with the crime?"

"No, I don't."

"But his sudden disappearance, M. Crowe?"

"He probably did not think that Mlle. Maguire's thousands were worth risking his neck," Crow replied.

The Commissaire rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Mon Dieu! It is an extraordinary case," he murmured.

"Have you any fresh news about Charles Carthew?" asked Crow. "My daughter wrote to tell me that you had traced him as far as Marseilles."

M. Peille searched amongst some papers on his desk and eventually selected one of them.

"Yes, this came in this morning," he said. "It is from my distinguished colleague at Marseilles. He says: 'Man with red hair, supposed to be English, crossed over to Ajaccio on *Napoleon Bonapart*, on Wednesday, March 28th. Ajaccio police confirm his arrival there, and are investigating. It is known that he departed from the town in great haste immediately he arrived.'"

Crow nodded his head contentedly.

"It should not be long before he is found," he said. "And now, M. Peille, I suppose there is no need for you to detain Michael Maguire any longer?"

"Good heavens! But you have not established his innocence or proved that anyone else took part in the crime," exclaimed M. Robin, indignantly. "I admit that your news points to Boughton and the other man being concerned, but your evidence is only circumstantial."

"There is reason in what M. Robin says," the Commissaire remarked, soothingly. "If I had any proof at all that Ernest Boughton had made a contravention in any way, I might arrest him and then, with the Préfet's approval, release young Maguire on parole. But at the moment, that is impossible. We must find this Charles Carthew, or Rayner, and question him closely. And we must talk to Boughton again. If they were concerned with the woman's death it will not be long before we get some admission out of them which will enable us to arrest them."

"Would you release Maguire if I could prove to you that Boughton was warning his brother that enquiries were being made in Corsica for him, and if you caught Boughton trying to get rid of me again?" Crow asked.

"Under those circumstances I would recommend his release to the Préfet," replied M. Peille.

"Then I will endeavour to supply you with that information without delay. Could you let me have the assistance of two armed men this evening?"

"But what is it that you will do, M. Crow?" demanded the Commissaire.

"I will tell you, M. Peille." And Martin Crow outlined a plan which met with the Commissaire's approval, and half an hour later he was leaving the Prefecture. He did not go over to Roquebrune but walked along to the Avenue de la Victoire where he entered a restaurant and ordered lunch. While

he was waiting for it he went into the telephone cabin and put through a call to the Pension Mireille. Mlle. Antoinette answered, and he asked if he could talk to his daughter.

"Good morning, my dear, and how are you all?"

"Very well, but where are you speaking from, Father?"

"A restaurant in Nice. I have some important instructions for you, Gerry. As soon as I have had lunch I am going to the Villa Gloria and I am going to tell Coral Trent that my room at the Pension is let, and ask if she will put me up for the night."

"But——?"

"Don't ask any questions, my dear. It is hardly likely that anyone will go and ask Mme. Ribaud or Mlle. Antoinette any questions, but if they should, I would like them to bear me out about my room being occupied. I think you can warn them tactfully."

"Very well. Anything else?"

"I don't think so, my dear, except that I hope to be able to take breakfast with you and Alison in the garden to-morrow at nine o'clock."

"You sound terribly mysterious, Father."

Martin Crow chuckled.

"Do I? Well, I must go or my lunch will be getting cold. Good-bye till to-morrow, and my love to Alison."

Before going over to Roquebrune Martin Crow bought a small suit-case in which he packed three other purchases which he made in various parts of Nice.

CHAPTER XXV

CORAL TRENT CONFIDES

MARTIN CROW hired a car and drove over to Roquebrune where he was admitted to the Villa Gloria by Boughton.

"Is Miss Trent at home?"

"I think she is in the garden, sir. Will you come into the drawing-room?"

"I am wondering if Miss Trent could possibly put me up for the night," Crow said as he followed the butler across the hall. "I have only just returned from London and I find that my room at the Pension Mireille has been let, and as I am going across to Corsica to-morrow I did not want the inconvenience of having to go to another hotel."

Crow had been watching the man closely and noticed the slight movement, and almost imperceptible stiffening of his muscles, as the name of the island was mentioned.

"I am sure Miss Trent will be only too pleased," he said, quickly recovering his composure. "Will you sit down, sir, and I will tell Miss Trent that you are here." He was about to go out of the room when he paused and turned. "May I venture to ask if you have any news of Mr. Michael, sir?" he asked.

"I have not seen him for more than a week, but I understand that he is in good health and as cheerful as could be expected under his trying conditions."

"Can you say when the trial is likely to take place?"

"His trial?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is most unlikely that he will have to appear before a court," replied Crow. "At least, I hope he won't."

"Indeed. May I ask if the police have got on to the track of someone else?"

"They haven't. They are still convinced that Mr. Maguire murdered his aunt, but I have very good reasons for thinking that an Australian by the name of Carthew was concerned with the crime. Have you ever heard of anyone of that name since you have been in Miss Maguire's service?"

"Carthew, did you say, sir?"

"Yes, Charles Carthew."

Boughton shook his head.

"I have never heard the name before, as far as I can recollect."

"You don't remember Miss Maguire ever receiving a visitor of that name, either here or in England?"

"The name is quite unknown to me, sir. Do you happen to know what the man is like, sir?"

"I know nothing about him except that he is supposed to be an Australian and went across to Corsica the day after Miss Maguire met her death.

That is why I am going over there to-morrow, so that I can verify all my information and then lay the facts before the Commissaire. At present he does not know anything about this man, Carthew."

"Do you think you will be able to track him down, sir?"

"It will not take me very long to discover his whereabouts when once I am over there," Crow replied with confidence.

There was a moment's silence, then Boughton said,

"It is a most extraordinary affair, sir, and I can only hope that you will be successful in finding the murderer and bring him to justice. I will go and tell Miss Trent that you wish to see her, sir."

"One moment. I particularly wish to talk with her privately, and I should be obliged if I could see her here, not in the garden."

"I will tell her what you say, sir."

Martin Crow paced slowly up and down the room for several minutes with his hands clasped behind his back. He was smiling faintly. Presently he went across to one of the windows and was standing there, watching a number of small sailing boats racing off Monte Carlo, when he heard someone entering the room.

"You wish to see me, Mr. Crow?" Coral Trent asked. She was restrained and nervous, as she had been when he first saw her, the morning he called with Gerry.

"Yes, I have come to ask a favour, Miss Trent. Perhaps Boughton told you what it is?"

She went forward and sat down on one of the Louis XIV chairs.

"He said something about your wishing to stay here for the night," she answered, avoiding his eyes.

Martin Crow thought that he heard a slight movement in the dining-room and it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from looking in that direction.

"I have just returned from London, where I have been making extensive enquiries relative to your aunt's death," he said, raising his voice a little. "When I got back to the Pension I found that my room had been let during my absence and that it won't be free for two or three days. I have rather a horror of going to hotels which I do not know, and I thought that as it is only for one night you might be good enough to put me up."

"I shall be only too pleased, Mr. Crow. Boughton suggested that you should have the room over the front door.

"That is very good of you. I don't mind what sort of a room it is. I shall be leaving quite early in the morning. I am hoping to discover the whereabouts of the individual who murdered Miss Maguire."

"You are still of the opinion that my cousin is innocent?"

"I am certain he is, Miss Trent."

"You know who did do it?"

"I do not know for certain, but I have very strong suspicions. Did you ever hear your aunt talk of a man named Charles Carthew?"

"Charles Carthew? I have never heard the name before."

"During the time that you lived with Miss Maguire did she, to your knowledge, ever receive a visit from a man who was probably an Australian?"

"Never. Why do you ask, Mr. Crow?"

"Because if I find an Australian named Charles Carthew I believe that I shall have found your aunt's murderer."

"Then you don't suspect Alan?" asked Coral in a changed tone. She suddenly appeared to be more at her ease and less apprehensive.

"Alan Berwick? But why should I suspect him, Miss Trent?"

A sound in the adjoining room caused Coral to turn sharply and Crow noticed that in an instant her bearing had become tense again. She stood up and went towards the window.

"Shall we go into the garden?" she asked. "It . . . it is so hot in here."

Having achieved his purpose in talking to her for a few minutes in the drawing-room, Crow readily consented.

"By all means," he said, and followed her on to the terrace.

"Let us go along to those chairs under the umbrella," Coral said, leading him to a bay in the terrace wall where three wicker chairs were arranged round a table. They sat down and the girl fixed her eyes upon the little sailing boats which were now running before the wind towards the entrance to Monaco harbour. She did not speak, but her lips moved as if she were forming words and could not make up her mind to utter them.

"Won't you tell me all about it?" Crow said in his most persuasive tone.

"Tell you what?" asked Coral, looking at him keenly.

"About that which is troubling you."

Her eyes went back to the little sailing boats and a minute or more elapsed before she spoke.

"He terrifies me," she said at length.

"Who does?"

"Boughton."

"How?"

"I can hardly explain. I didn't mean to tell anyone, but just now . . . I . . . I knew that he was in the dining-room listening to what we were saying."

"But why does he terrify you?"

"He seems——" She broke off and shuddered.

"What does he seem?"

Coral glanced furtively round and when she spoke again she lowered her voice.

"He is like a great cat walking about the house

so silently, as if he was always spying. I didn't notice it when I first came to stay here. It has been recently. It began a few days, perhaps a week, before the . . . before my aunt died. Whenever she and I were together in one of the rooms I always felt that he was somewhere near, listening and watching."

"Did your aunt notice anything?"

"No. I once told her that I thought he was trying to overhear what we were saying, but she only laughed and said that I was imagining things. But you haven't answered my question about Alan, Mr. Crow."

"Why should you have thought that I suspected him of having had anything to do with your aunt's death?"

"He said he thought you did, and that your daughter certainly suspected him."

"When did he tell you that?"

"I don't think I can remember which day it was; but one evening he went down to your Pension to tell you that the police had taken his fingerprints."

"Yes, he did."

"And you told him that you were certain my aunt's murderer was a left-handed man."

"That is quite right."

"He is left-handed, and he said you knew he was."

"As a matter of fact, my dear Miss Trent, I did not know which hand he used habitually until——"

"Yes, yes, I know; you went to speak to the Commissaire on the 'phone and your daughter found out by making him throw stones at a tree. He thought he had been tricked, and I believe he lost his temper and insulted you. Alan is really little more than a child, Mr. Crow, and absurdly nervous. He was in a dreadful state that night, and came up here to tell me all about it. He said he was certain that he would be arrested, and that everyone was against him. He said he was going to get away before they could get hold of him. I tried to persuade him to stay, but he wouldn't. You surely suspected him that night, Mr. Crow?"

"To be perfectly frank I suspected that he might possibly have had something to do with the crime, but I never thought that he struck the blow which resulted in Miss Maguire's death," Crow replied.

"But why? Just because he had admitted being in the Villa garden that night?"

"Not only because of those two facts, Miss Trent. You see, for some reason both you and he had been trying to mislead my daughter and myself. That morning, for example, when we first made your acquaintance, down there on one of the lower terraces, you led us to suppose that Alan Berwick was on the friendliest terms with your aunt; in fact that he was her friend rather than yours. And then afterwards he told me several things which were quite untrue; that he had been

sent down here for his health and that he had never wished to marry you."

"Yes, I suppose we were both very silly," Coral said. Since they had been sitting in the garden she had been displaying a naturalness which Crow had never seen in her before.

"Why did you do it, Miss Trent?"

Coral did not reply immediately. She sat with her chin resting upon her hand and her elbow supported on her knee. After a few moments she sat upright and looked unhesitatingly at Crow.

"We were terribly afraid," she said. "You must try to understand that the fifteen months during which I had been living with my aunt were the unhappiest months of my life. To strangers she may have appeared to be a normal, pleasant woman; but she was a tyrant who was never happy unless she was imposing her will upon someone. It was not so bad when we were here last year, or afterwards when we were travelling about. But when we were staying at Merryfields and Alan and I fell in love with each other she made my life unbearable. And from that time onwards it became worse and worse. She made me spend hours every day learning French which I hated. The climax came when she conceived the mad idea of forcing Michael and me to marry. I knew that she would threaten to make him penniless, and I knew that she would treat me in the same way if I defied her about Alan."

"Are you going to marry Mr. Berwick when all this business has been cleared up?"

There was a long pause during which Coral gazed into the far distance.

"Yes, I am," she replied suddenly. Another pause. "I see that you do not approve, Mr. Crow."

"Am I so transparent as that?" he answered, a little surprised by the quickness of her perception.

"I know that you have rather a poor opinion of Alan."

"I scarcely know him. I have only met him twice."

"I imagine that it does not take you very long to sum people up. Of course you think that Alan only wants me for the money which he hopes I shall inherit. Perhaps you are right."

"And you will marry him on those terms?"

"Certainly. Alan may be weak and irresponsible, but he can be led."

"You failed to persuade him to stay here?" said Crow.

"Because I did not press the point. He was in such a nervous, almost hysterical state, that I thought it might be better if he went. He wanted me to go, too, but I knew that that would be very unwise."

"You know where he is?"

"In Rome."

"I appreciate your confidence in me, Miss Trent."

Coral shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"I realise now that you do not suspect him at

all. I expect you think, as I do, that he would not have the courage to commit a crime like that."

"It was because I originally formed that opinion of him that I never really thought that he had murdered your aunt, but I did think that he might have been persuaded by someone to take a passive part, in some way."

"It is because of his weakness of character that I am resolved to marry him, Mr. Crow. Alan needs a guiding hand."

"I can only wish you every happiness, Miss Trent."

"We make our own happiness when once we have learnt our lesson, don't we, Mr. Crow?"

A gong sounded in the villa and half an hour later they dined on the terrace outside the dining-room.

"I should like to be called early," Crow said as they got up from the table.

"At what time, sir?" Boughton asked.

"Half past six, if that is not too early for you."

"I am always up at that hour, sir. Will you take a cup of tea then, sir?"

"If I might have a cup of coffee and a roll I shall not require anything more. I am rather a heavy sleeper so you may have to come in and shake me."

"I will see that you are roused, sir," said Boughton as he began to remove the things from the table.

Soon after ten o'clock Martin Crow said good night and went upstairs.

CHAPTER XXVI

BOUGHTON FAILS AGAIN

WHEN Martin Crow entered his room he walked across to the windows and threw back the green shutters. For several minutes he stood there, looking across the garden, towards the village, perched high up on the mountain-side. The path leading up to it was clearly marked by a zig-zagging row of brilliant electric lights.

After a while Crow turned and took stock of the arrangement of the furniture in the room. The bed was facing the window, with its head against the wall. The door was on the right of the bed, as he looked at it; and a large, built-in wardrobe was on the left. A dressing-table, with flounces, stood on one side of the window, and a large easy chair on the other. Crow went across to the wardrobe and looked inside. It was spacious and would have permitted a person of normal height to stand upright in the hanging compartment. He appeared to be well pleased with his investigation for he was smiling to himself as he went across to the other side of the room and began to unpack the suit-case which he had bought in Nice that afternoon. Its

contents consisted of a white wig, two small cushions and a ball of thick string. He laid these things on the bed.

For several seconds Martin Crow stood looking thoughtfully at his recent purchases; then he glanced round at the door. There was a small bolt on a line with the handle and he tried to shoot it across; but it only moved a fraction of an inch. There was no key. Neither of these discoveries caused him any surprise and after a moment's consideration he hung his handkerchief over the bolt so that it covered the keyhole. He then turned his attention to the things on the bed once more.

During the next half hour Crow worked deftly and silently. He turned back the bed-clothes and then manipulated the two cushions, one of the pillows, and the white wig until he had built up a form which, when the clothes were replaced, resembled a white-haired man sleeping on his right side, with his back to the door. He took the greatest care to make his dummy realistic, and when he was entirely satisfied with the result he returned to the window and stood there, framed against the lighted room, until he saw a faint flicker in the shrubbery below. He glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to eleven. During the next fifteen minutes he moved about the room and splashed water in the wash-basin, as if he was preparing for bed. At the end of that time he picked up the ball of string from the bed, switched out the light and returned to the

window once more. Unwinding the string he allowed one end to fall over the outer sill and drop on to the path below. As soon as he felt a slight jerk he began pulling the string in until a rope ladder came into sight. It was fitted with two stout hooks which he fastened round the inner sill. After a short interval a bowler hat appeared and the next moment Crow was helping M. Peille to climb into the room. Both men then gave their assistance to the Brigadier who, being a large man, found it more difficult to climb over the sill.

Not a word was spoken and scarcely a sound made as Crow took his companions over to the bed, and, by the light of his electric torch, showed them the dummy. The Commissaire nodded his head approvingly and taking a slip of paper from his pocket handed it to Crow who looked at it at once. It was a telegraph form which bore the stamp of the Beausoleil post office and was timed for 5.30 p.m. of that day. The following address and message were in the hand-writing of the sender:

“Charles Carthew, Café Bellacosia, Pentic, Corse. Leave for Italy at once or be prepared for unwelcome visitor. E.”

Crow smiled and handed the form back to the Commissaire. He then showed them the wardrobe, indicating that he would hide himself inside it, and he pointed to the chair and dressing-table. M. Peille understood and motioned to the Brigadier

to conceal himself behind the latter while he took up a position behind the chair.

Martin Crow stepped into the wardrobe and arranged the door so that it was almost closed but permitted him to see the further side of the bed and the door of the room. With a revolver in one hand, and his torch in the other, he made himself as comfortable as the restricted space would permit. The time passed with wearying slowness, but Crow was prepared for this. He was well aware that his plan might fail altogether, but even if it succeeded he knew that they might have to wait until the hour before dawn.

Owing to his abnormal height Crow was not able to stand upright and he knelt down, first on one knee and then on the other, but always with his attention upon the other side of the room. He heard the village clock strike twelve, one, and two, and then a long time elapsed before the three men stiffened themselves and listened intently. Their eyes were fixed upon the door of the room and after a few seconds they saw it being opened slowly. Suddenly a faint light filled the room and they saw the figure of a man moving stealthily across to the bed. He held a torch in one hand and was directing the light on to the floor, as if he were afraid lest the glare might wake the man who, he supposed, was sleeping. They could only guess what he held in the other hand.

Crow was watching every movement that the

man made. He saw him pause as he reached the side of the bed; he saw his right hand go up, and he heard a sharp click.

"Put your hands up, Boughton, or I fire," Crow cried.

Boughton wheeled round and found the beams of three torches trained upon him. His hand went up again, but the click as his trigger fell was drowned by the report of the Brigadier's weapon. There was a muttered oath and Boughton staggered back against the wall and slithered to the ground.

"Be carefull!" cried the Commissaire as the Brigadier sprang forward and switched on the light. But Boughton was not fainting. He was wearing an overcoat over his pyjamas and a red stain on the light-coloured jacket showed that he had been hit in the chest. The Commissaire knelt down beside him and examined the wound.

"Your aim is too good, Brigadier," he said. "I doubt if we shall get anything out of him. I must go and telephone for a doctor."

From across the landing there came the frightened cries of Coral Trent, asking what had happened. Crow went to her door and as he knocked he heard excited voices coming from the servants' sleeping quarters on the far side of the villa.

"It is Martin Crow," he said at Coral's door. "There is no need to be alarmed."

"Oh, what has happened? I'm so terrified," came back the girl's hysterical voice.

"Please do not be alarmed, Miss Trent. M. Peille and his men are here. You are quite safe."

Crow heard footsteps in the room and then the door was opened a few inches. Coral was trembling violently and could scarcely speak.

"But what has happened?" she managed to say.

"Boughton tried to kill me again, and he has been shot."

"He is dead?" she asked eagerly.

"I don't know."

"But why did he try to kill you?"

"He knew that I had discovered that he planned your aunt's death."

"He killed her?"

"I don't think so, but he planned it all."

Coral covered her face with her hands and sat down on a chair by the door.

"Thank God that man won't be able to terrify me any more," she murmured.

While they waited for the doctor to come Crow knelt down by Boughton's side and translated the questions which the Commissaire asked, but the man was dying and did not appear to hear. He lay motionless, and as he groaned blood oozed from his lips.

"Ask him straight out what Charles Carthew had to do with the crime," demanded M. Peille, sharply.

At the mention of his brother's name Boughton tried to rouse himself and looked up at Crow.

"He didn't do it," he murmured, feebly. "I . . .

It was I who killed her . . . for his sake . . . I . . . I owed it to him."

Then he lapsed into silence once more. When the doctor arrived with the ambulance he shook his head gravely and expressed the doubt that Boughton would survive the journey to the hospital.

"Well, M. Crow," said the Commissaire, a little later, "I offer you my homage. As in the *affaire Jéhnan* you were right from the beginning. His revolver, I see, is a .45 centimetres as you suspected."

"Yes, I never had any doubt about that, M. Peille."

"And do you think he spoke the truth when he said that he killed Mlle. Maguire?"

"No, I am more than ever convinced that it was his brother. Boughton, of course, knew that he was dying; but apart from that I should have expected him to confess to the crime. He was devoted to Charles and did the same thing in London when he knew that there was going to be trouble. He sent his brother out of the country and himself remained to face the consequences. Scoundrel that he was, he had his good qualities."

The Commissaire shrugged.

"Eh bien!" he said. "It will not be long before I know for certain."

"You are going to Corsica?"

"I have ordered a sea-plane to be ready to leave Nice harbour for Ajaccio in an hour's time."

"You think it will be easy to find him?"

"Yes, with the aid of the Corsican gendarmerie."

I am taking an interpreter with me and hope to get a full confession out of Charles Carthew. And now, M. Crow, you are naturally thinking about your young friend over at Nice. He will, of course, be released at once. You will be coming over?"

Martin Crow looked at his watch.

"It is only just four o'clock," he replied. "I shall lie down for two or three hours and then, no doubt, Mlle. Trent will order the car to take me over. I will be at the Prefecture at about eight. I should like to bring him back to his fiancée."

"Eight o'clock. By that time I hope to be on my way to Corsica, but M. Maguire will be waiting for you in my office. I shall let you know as soon as I have any news. You will be remaining in Roquebrune for some time?"

Martin Crow smiled.

"I came here for a holiday, M. Peille, but I have been working very hard during the last fortnight. It is probable that my daughter will insist upon my remaining for another week or ten days."

"Ah, Mademoiselle! She takes care of her father, no?"

"Yes. I am afraid that she is too fond of getting her own way where I am concerned; and she gets it far too often," Crow answered.

It was going to be warm again. A light haze hung over Monte Carlo and the Tête du Chien. The Pension garden was filled with the murmur of the

bees as they sucked honey from the orange flowers, and on the stone wall by the gate three or four green lizards were lazily sunning themselves. Gerry and Alison were sitting in the little arbour, waiting for Martin Crow. It was nearly ten o'clock.

"I wonder what is keeping him," Gerry said, after a long silence.

"Do you think that he discovered something about Coral Trent when he was in England?"

"I don't know. I couldn't get a word out of him yesterday when he rang up. I get so furious with him when he is in one of those silent, mysterious moods."

At that moment Mlle. Antoinette came running out of the house.

"Mam'selle! Have you heard what has happened up at the Villa Gloria?" she cried, beside herself with excitement.

"What?" in anxious tones from both Gerry and Alison.

"The butler has been shot and taken to the hospital at Nice."

"Boughton! Who shot him?" questioned Gerry.

"I don't know, but I have just been talking to M. Bandol, who delivers the telegrams, and he says that the Commissaire telephoned from the villa at three o'clock this morning for the doctor and an ambulance. M. Bandol got it from the cook at the villa half an hour ago and she said the butler was in a grave condition."

"Did she say anything about my father?" Gerry asked anxiously.

"No, Mam'selle, she——"

"Michael!"

Alison had jumped up and was running across the garden towards Michael and Crow who had just entered by the upper gate. Crow left the two young people to themselves and joined his daughter.

"I am sorry that we are so late, my dear," he said as he kissed her, "but it was quite impossible for us to get here any sooner. That young man insisted upon going to a shop and buying a complete outfit before he showed himself here. He certainly was looking rather shabby."

"But did you know that you would be bringing him when you rang up yesterday?"

Mlle. Antoinette had rushed into the house to tell her mother that M. Maguire had returned and that everyone was happy once more. Michael and Alison were still talking at the far end of the terrace.

"I wasn't certain, my dear," Crow answered, "but I was counting on it. That is why I suggested having *petit déjeuner* out here at nine. I thought it would be a fitting setting for a happy reunion."

"What is this we have just heard about Boughton being shot, Father?"

"It is quite true, and it makes a long story which I will relate as soon as we have had something to eat. Poor fellow. He won't trouble this world any more."

"He is dead?"

"He died on the way to the hospital."

CHAPTER XXVII

M. PEILLE APOLOGISES

“IT doesn’t really matter to me whether a court would uphold the will or not,” Michael was saying two mornings later when they were all sitting in the Pension garden. “Coral must have her half share and the villa.”

“That, of course, is reasonable,” said Martin Crow as he ran his fingers through the white stubble on his head, “but I felt that I ought to tell you that a judge might not accept the maiden-name signature. As a matter of fact I do not think that Coral will say thank you for the villa.”

“And I don’t think that Michael and I would feel like going there,” said Alison.

“I can understand your feelings, my dear,” said Crow, “although I should not mind having it as a retreat when the winters in England are particularly objectionable. I——”

“Pardon, M. Crow, but M. Peille is here and wishes to see you and M. Maguire.”

It was Mademoiselle Antoinette who had just come out from the house.

“M. Peille! Back already! Will you ask him to come out, Mademoiselle?”

A few moments later the Commissaire, looking very tired and hot, came across to the harbour. He appeared to be a little nervous as he made a low bow.

"I arrived back from Corsica two hours ago and I have come here to offer to you all my sincere apologies," he said, speaking French. Then, turning to Michael he bowed again and said, in English, "M. Maguire, I am so sorree; so sorree that I cannot tell you."

Michael smiled and offered his hand which the Commissaire gripped.

"It has all been a terrible mistake of which I am profoundly ashamed," the latter said, reverting to his native language. "I felt that I owed it to you all to bring you the news of the dénouement."

"You found him?" asked Crow.

"Yes." A pause. "And now he, too, is dead."

"What? Charles Carthew?" Crow exclaimed. "Please sit down and tell us all about it."

"Yesterday," M. Peille began, when they were all seated, "a little after midday, I and M. Sigean, the interpreter, arrived at the Café Bellacosia and asked the patron for M. Carthew. There were several people in the restaurant taking their déjeuner at the time and I had scarcely mentioned the name when there was a report, and a man sitting at a small table in a corner fell sideways on to the floor."

"He shot himself?" asked Michael. Crow translated the question.

"That is so, Monsieur. Afterwards the patron told me that his English guest had seemed like a hunted animal ever since his arrival nearly a fortnight ago. However, we rushed across to him. There was no doubt. He had the red hair and the figure that you, M. Crow, described. There, at Pentica, there is no doctor near and two hours passed before one arrived from Bocognano, and by that time he had given up his last breath. We picked him up from the floor and carried him upstairs and laid him on a bed and there I began to question him, but could get no answer until I told him that if he would speak he might save his brother from the guillotine. He——"

"You told him that?" asked Crow, in a disapproving tone.

"But yes. I was determined that I should know the truth, and I suspected that he could not live for long. As with Boughton, the bullet must have entered the lung. Then, with difficulty, and with many pauses, he made a partial confession. He began by declaring that his brother was innocent and that it was he who had killed Mlle. Maguire. He spoke of his crime in Australia. He was destitute, he said and scarcely realised what he was doing. When he came out of prison he wrote to Ernest, in England, and told him that he had married a very wealthy English woman, giving her maiden name, also the name of her home. He said that he would like to get into touch with her, but did

not dare to come to England because he knew that he might be arrested. After several weeks Ernest replied. He said that things had been going very badly for him; he had only been able to get occasional employment but now, after encountering great difficulties, he had succeeded in entering Mlle. Maguire's employment as her maître d'hotel. He had worked hard for this because he thought that they might, between them, get a good sum of money out of Mademoiselle. Ernest said that his mistress spent each winter on the Côte d'Azur and he advised Charles to work his way to Marseilles and then visit his wife. He took that advice, presented himself to Mlle. Maguire and induced her to make him an allowance of five hundred livres sterling a year, on the conditions which you related to me. A few weeks ago, finding himself heavily in debt, he decided that he must take drastic steps to get more money. At first he decided that he would try to blackmail her, and then the idea occurred to him that if he could only destroy her will—which, according to his brother, was kept in the safe at the villa—and then murder her he would inherit the whole fortune."

"You did not tell him that Ernest had confessed to having committed the crime?" Crow asked.

"No. I tried to induce him to tell me what part his brother had played, but he would say nothing until I told him that Ernest had made two unsuccessful attempts to kill you, that he had been shot

dead whilst making the second effort, and that M. Maguire was being charged with having murdered his aunt."

"You were determined to know everything, M. Peille," said Crow, who did not quite approve of the Commissaire's methods.

"But naturally. It was for that reason, as well as to arrest him, that I went to Corsica. And I was successful. He told me all I wished to know. He admitted that it was Ernest who told him that there was certain to be a violent quarrel between Mlle. Maguire and her nephew and that it would be an opportunity for murdering the woman. Ernest, as you suspected, planned it all. On Tuesday night he complained to the other servants of feeling indisposed and went up to bed early, taking care that Mlle. Trent saw him going into his bedroom. He stayed there for only a few minutes and then lowered himself out of the window by a rope, joining Charles in the garden.

"Together they listened at the library window. As soon as M. Maguire left the room Ernest entered the salon by the window and went into the hall where he kept watch. He heard the blow being struck with the candlestick and then entered the library. Charles told him that he was going to destroy the two wills, which he had found on the writing table, and would then search the safe. Charles found the five *mille* notes and Ernest suggested that they should be hidden amongst M. Maguire's

clothes in his room. At that moment Ernest heard a door being opened upstairs and he told Charles to make his escape by the window. Charles did so and walked over to Monte Carlo where he caught the last train to Marseilles.

"For the rest we can only imagine that Ernest did not have time to close and fasten the library window, as he had probably arranged to do, but slipped into the salon and saw M. Maguire coming down the stairs through the glass doors."

"Almost word for word as you said, Father," Gerry exclaimed.

"Yes, I wasn't very far out, was I, my dear?" Crow said, and then translated the Commissaire's story for the benefit of Alison and Michael, who had only understood fragments of it."

"And Mlle. Trent, she is still at the villa?" asked M. Peille.

"No, she did not feel like remaining there," Gerry replied. "She is staying at the Château Diodato."

"But of course; that is reasonable. She has any news of M. Berwick?"

"She is expecting him to return to-day."

"Ah! She knew where he was?"

"Yes. She has explained everything to me. The young man took fright when you asked him to give you his finger-prints. I understand that they will be married quite soon."

"Ah! So it was a little romance after all?" smiled

the Commissaire. "And may I ask if there will be another wedding before very long?"

"As soon as we get back to England," Crow replied.

M. Peille stood up and made a solemn bow to Alison and Michael.

"Mlle. Beamish, M. Maguire," he said, impressively, "I ask your pardon for my inability to speak your language, but my respected colleague here will tell you what I am saying. From the depths of my heart I again express to you my most profound regrets for all that you have both suffered, and I can only say that I shall feel deeply honoured if you will show your forgiveness by sending me an invitation to your wedding. It will not be possible for me to accept it, but I shall treasure it."

"Not only will we send you an invitation," said Alison when Crow had translated the Commissaire's speech, "but you shall have a large slice of wedding cake."

"Mademoiselle, you are too good," replied M. Peille as he stood up and shook hands. Something glinted in the corner of his eye. He brushed it brusquely away with his handkerchief, and wished them all good day.

7. 10. 1915

The weather was very fine and the sun was shining brightly. I went for a walk in the park and saw many beautiful flowers. The children were playing happily and the old people were sitting on the benches. I saw a small dog running and a cat sitting on a wall. The birds were singing and the leaves were rustling. It was a very pleasant day and I enjoyed it very much.

JAN 17 1938

